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SPRING SALADS

SIX CLASSIC AMERICAN RECIPES

PAGE 50



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BY MARGO TRUE

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI

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BY MAURICIO VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN



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FIRST

A Taste of Mexico City

Everyone else was taking to the ramparts, but we needed to eat

BACK IN NOVEMBER 2006, a few days before I was due to arrive in Mexico City to help Penny De Los Santos, the photographer who was to shoot this month's article about El Mercado de la Merced, one of the oldest and largest food markets in Latin America (see page 38), I received an e-mail from the story's author, Mauricio Velázquez de León. "I have something very important to tell you," he wrote. "December 1 is the inauguration of the new president. A local friend of mine strongly believes that La Merced will be closed because of the political climate in the city." At the time, former Mexican presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador had been contesting President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa's recent victory, and Obrador's supporters were likely to protest on the morning of the inaugural ceremony.

Because of the market's size—it is thought to comprise more than a hundred acres—and frenetic nature, I hadn't made a detailed itinerary for our visit. Instead, I figured that Penny, Mauricio, and I could casually slip into the place, explore, and capture all the images we needed. I hadn't wagered on a demonstration's getting in our way.

A protest did swell in Mexico City's *zócalo*, or central square, on the morning of the president's inauguration, but it didn't shut down La Merced. We gathered in the center of the market, just a couple of subway stops away from the crowds and circling helicopters. It turned out to be a good time to begin our work; the aisles were considerably less clogged than usual. Mauricio, who grew up going to the market but hadn't been back in years, walked us past merchants selling carrots, mangoes, chiles, and banana leaves and introduced us to the charac-

ters who would appear in his article. Though I had spent time in Mexico City before, on that day I encountered foods I'd never known, such as purslane and pork stew, and esquites, a corn dish with queso fresco. Mauricio laughed out loud when he found me sampling chapulines (fried grasshoppers) and acamayás (cured river shrimp). I found the former to be pleasingly crunchy; the latter were funky in every regard.



Managing editor Binns sampling acamayás at La Merced.

All the foods I saw (and ate!) at the market are available citywide. But countless *chilangos*—as Mexico City natives call themselves—still throng to La Merced to buy their daily food. The place has endured for nearly 150 years, seemingly impervious to political upheaval and other prosaic concerns. After all, there's a city waiting to be fed. —LILY BINNS, Managing Editor



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FARE

News and Novelties from the World of Food, plus Book Review, Agenda, and More

AGENDA

MAY

6

54TH ANNUAL COSBY RAMP FESTIVAL

Cosby, Tennessee

One of the longest-running events of its kind in the state, the Ramp Festival, held in this town in the Great Smoky Mountains, makes the most of the ramp, a mildly sweet, scallion-like bulb native to the eastern United States. Dig into dishes that highlight the ingredient, such as barbecued chicken and ramps, as well as other Appalachian favorites like fried corn bread and fatback. Wear your dancing shoes—a live bluegrass band will be performing—and if you happen to be of the female persuasion and age 16 to 21, you're welcome to enter the running for the Maid of Ramps crown. Information: 423/623-1009.

MAY

11-13

CANDAT SOTONG FIESTA

Redang, Malaysia

Nighttime is the right time for squid jigging—if you find yourself in Malaysia's Terengganu archipelago. Residents of Redang, the largest of these South China Sea islands, formally celebrate the start of squid season by setting out in a fleet of small boats after sunset to seek their tentacled quarry. Squid jigging, in case you're wondering, is the act of fishing for squid using a jigger, a colorfully adorned plastic or tin lure known in Malay as a *candat*. Visitors can arrange to join local fishermen for a night of squid fishing, but those less nautically inclined may spend the wee hours on the beach watching traditional dancing and snacking on regional dishes like sata (grilled fish wrapped in a banana leaf) as they await the night's haul. Information: 212/754-1113.



Eight-Story Glory

This time-honored Maryland dessert is a many-layered wonder

PEOPLE WHO DON'T understand these cakes think the layers are cut with dental floss," says Beverly Guy, a 58-year-old homemaker, as she stirs chocolate icing in a saucepan, "but I have ten individual pans. And I always make one layer at a time." The cakes to which

Guy is referring are an old tradition on Smith Island, where she lives. Settled in 1657 and located off the southern tip of Maryland, Smith Island (actually a grouping of small islands) is known for its dearth of motorized vehicles, its generations of resourceful fishermen, and the

MAY

18

Birthday

ALLAN BURNS

1936, Baltimore, Maryland

Television writer and producer Allan Burns may be the most famous for having cocreated *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, but we like to remember him for another of his inventions: Captain Horatio Magellan Crunch. The mascot for Cap'n Crunch, the popular breakfast cereal, was born in 1962, when a team of admen hired by the Quaker Oats Company visited

the animation studio where Burns worked at the time, hoping to tap the writers there for marketing ideas.

Today the Cap'n is one of the most enduring cereal mascots—ranked behind Snap, Crackle, and Pop; the Trix Rabbit; and Tony the Tiger.



MAY

18–20

LODI ZINFEST

Lodi, California

Considering that the winemakers in this small appellation, centered around the town of Lodi, east of San Francisco, make roughly 40 percent of the zinfandel that comes out of California each year, it's no wonder that locals like to honor the robust varietal. The festival kicks off at Lodi Lake Park with a Friday-night dinner and a fireworks display. On Saturday, visitors can browse stalls offering food from area restaurants and produce from nearby farms, all while quaffing the local reds. The wineries that dot the surrounding countryside keep their doors open on Sunday, and Lodi's San Joaquin County Historical Society has an exhibit of vintage vineyard equipment. Information: 209/365-0621.

MAY

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SAGRA DEI LIMONI

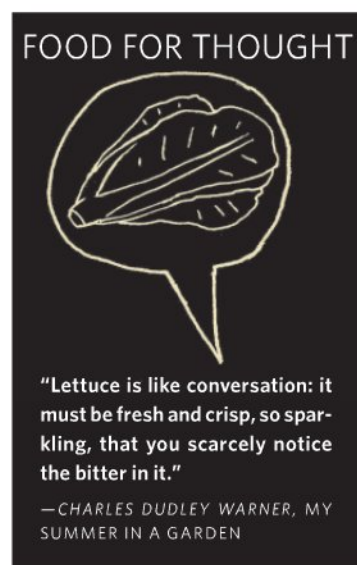
Monterosso, Italy

Once a year, the people of Monterosso, one of the five villages that make



feat of culinary architecture that is the Smith Island cake. Composed of eight to ten slender layers of cake (usually yellow) carefully mortared together with a cooked chocolate icing, the impressive confection in its most basic form is known among islanders simply as chocolate cake—as if there were no other version of that dessert.

The cake has been around for generations; Guy remembers it as a weekend staple in the homes of Smith Island families. “Every Saturday,” she says, “almost every family made one. Then, that night you had



steak with onion gravy and mashed potatoes for dinner and the cake for dessert.” Today, only a handful of islanders make the cakes with any regularity. A few local women bake the desserts at home and sell them to the Bayside Inn, Smith Island's only restaurant, and to restaurants in nearby mainland towns like Crisfield and Salisbury.

Some present-day Smith Island cooks embellish their cake by adding fresh peaches, fig preserves, or even crushed candy between the layers, but virtually all modern recipes insist on two ingredients: the first is evaporated milk, usually used in both the cake and the icing (a holdover from the days when fresh milk was seldom available on the islands); the second is Duncan

Hines Classic Yellow Cake mix.

Mary Ada Marshall, a 59-year-old housewife and locally famous part-time cook, who has been selling her cakes for more than 15 years, uses the mix just as other bakers would use cake flour: she adds butter, vanilla, eggs, and evaporated milk to it and “whips it all up good” in her standing mixer. For the icing, she combines confectioners' sugar, cocoa, butter, and just enough evaporated milk

“to hold it together” and cooks all the ingredients in a saucepan until the butter is melted. “Wait until the cake is cool before icing it,” she cautions. “You don't want the layers to slide apart—then you'd have quite a puzzle on your hands.”

Marshall, who learned to make Smith Island cakes by watching her mother and grandmother, adds, “It's not an art you can't learn. You just need a little confidence.” —*Mary Zajac*

RECIPE**Smith Island Cake**

(Eight-Layer Chocolate-Peanut Butter Cake)

MAKES ONE 8" CAKE

This version of the Smith Island cake comes from island resident Mary Ada Marshall. Each layer contains a sprinkling of powdered peanut butter cups, and the top is garnished with chunks of the same.

8 large Reese's peanut butter cups, frozen

Nonstick cooking spray

1/4 cup flour

1 18 1/4-oz. box yellow cake mix, preferably Duncan Hines

2 cups plus 3 tbsp. evaporated milk

16 tbsp. butter, softened

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1/2 tsp. salt

4 eggs

6 cups confectioners' sugar

1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa

1. Pulse 4 peanut butter cups in a food processor into small chunks; transfer to a bowl. Pulse remaining peanut butter cups into a fine powder; transfer to another bowl. Chill both until ready to use.

2. Heat oven to 350°. Grease four 8" round cake pans with cooking spray, dust with half the flour, and knock out any excess. Set aside. Put cake mix, 1 1/2 cups evaporated milk, half the butter, vanilla, salt, eggs, and 1/3 cup water into a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer until light and fluffy, 10–12 minutes. Divide half the batter between prepared cake pans. Set remaining batter aside. Using the back of a spoon, spread out batter so that it covers the bottom of each pan, making it slightly thicker around the edges than in the middle. Bake until cooked through and golden around edges, 12–14 minutes. Set aside to let cool slightly, then loosen cake layers with a knife and invert onto cooling racks. Wash and dry cake pans. Repeat process a second time with cooking spray and remaining flour and batter.

3. When all 8 cake layers have cooled, make the icing. Combine remaining milk, sugar, and cocoa in a medium pot; stir well, then add remaining butter. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until butter is melted and icing is shiny, 4–5 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Stir well.

4. Spread a cake layer with about 1/4 cup of icing; sprinkle with about 1 tbsp. powdered peanut butter cups. Top with another cake layer and repeat process to make 8 layers in all. Frost outside of cake with remaining icing; sprinkle top with peanut butter cup chunks. Let sit for 2–3 hours before serving. The cake can be stored for up to a week refrigerated in an airtight container.

A FRIEND, PLAINLY SPOKEN

We were saddened by the news that Sharon Tyler Herbst, author of *Food Lover's Companion*, died in January after a battle with cancer. Since its publication in 1990 by Barron's, that handy softcover dictionary has morphed into something of an appendage, comfortably in our hand whether we're cooking, writing, or eating. Other books woo us with historical and technical weight, but this one won us over with straight answers to persistent culinary questions like What can I substitute for buttermilk? and What the heck are chalazae? (They're cordlike strands of egg white connected to the yolk.) Tyler Herbst, who never revealed her age, began writing food books only in 1983; she published 16 in all, including the estimable *Food Lover's Tiptonary*



(Morrow, 1994). But it was *Food Lover's Companion* that came to define her career. The authoritative glossary was an unpretentious navigational aid that taught waiters how to pronounce the names of dishes and gave home cooks an arsenal of tips and techniques. "She wanted to make it user-friendly because, when she was learning about food, she didn't have a tool like this," said Ron Herbst, her husband of 38 years. The book has expanded alongside America's culinary consciousness, growing from 3,000 terms in the first edition to more than 6,700 in the edition due out this fall. "What I like about her best," said New Orleans restaurateur Dickie Brennan, a longtime friend of Tyler Herbst's, "is that there was never any BS." We wholeheartedly agree. —Dana Bowen

Cool Operator

My Minnesota-born mother had never tasted bourbon before she met my father, a rock-and-roller from Oklahoma. He loved the stuff, and his favorite drink made from it was an icy mint julep, that supremely soothing cocktail without which any Kentucky Derby party is incomplete. The julep is the ultimate sultry-weather cooler, as indispensable as a seersucker suit. Often served in a chilled silver cup—though my dad preferred an old-fashioned glass like the one shown above—the mint julep is bourbon whiskey served over cracked or crushed ice and mixed

with simple syrup that's been muddled with fresh mint leaves (though some people eschew the muddling and infuse the bourbon or simple syrup with the leaves and then drain it). A few sprigs of fresh mint are the mandatory garnish. The sweetness of the syrup smooths the bourbon's sharp edges, and the clean, refreshing perfume of the mint combines with the chill of the glass to create a potent, icy sensation that invariably caused my dad to let out a rebel yell after his first sip. Now I often do the same. —Lily Binns

METHOD

Mint Julep

According to cocktail historian David Wondrich, mint juleps were originally made with cognac. Bourbon was probably adopted as a substitute by Southerners after the Civil War. Put 2 tbsp. superfine sugar on a plate. Moisten the rim of a glass (if you have a silver julep cup, that's even better) with a damp towel. Press rim of glass into some of the sugar to coat. Put 10 spearmint leaves and 1–2 tbsp. simple syrup (half water, half sugar) into glass. Crush leaves very gently with a pestle, just enough to bruise them. Fill to the brim with crushed ice (see page 86), then pour in enough Kentucky bourbon to cover ice, about 1/2 cup. Stir one turn with a swizzle stick. Garnish with a leafy sprig of spearmint. Makes 1.

FARE

up the Cinque Terre along the cliffs of the Ligurian coast, pay homage to the lemon, which grows in vast quantities in the surrounding countryside. Plenty of lemons get squeezed—fresh lemonade is abundant, as are lemon tarts and limoncino (the local lemon peel liqueur)—but plenty are also elevated to decorative art: the windows of shops, restaurants, and homes are adorned with them, and prizes are awarded for the best displays. Information: www.cinqueterre.it.

MAY

19–27

LA FÊTE DU CHOCOLAT DE BROMONT

Bromont, Quebec

Two tons—that's the projected amount of chocolate that will be consumed each day during this massive two-weekend festival, which organizers say will attract more than 50,000 people to this town, an hour east of Montreal, that's home to Canada's first chocolate museum. Should you actually tire of eating the substance, you can watch professional artists create sculptures from giant blocks of it, among other chocolatey entertainments. Information: 450/534-4078.



MAY

26–27

CZECH/SLOVAK FESTIVAL AT BOHEMIAN HALL

Queens, New York

This event honoring the heritage of New York's Czech and Slovak immigrants is held at the 97-year-old Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden in Queens, built during the height of Czech and Slovak immigration. Enjoy goulash, suckling pig, chicken paprikash, and lots of Pilsner Urquell beer beneath shady elms, and watch dancers in brightly colored kroje (traditional costumes) entertain the crowd. Na zdraví! Information: 718/274-4925.

Meet the Tenderizer

"Octopus is an exotic ingredient for a lot of people," says Vincent Cutrone, the Italian-born owner of the Octopus Garden seafood store in Brooklyn, New York. "Even my kids won't eat it." His children's qualms notwithstanding, Cutrone is a man who knows that cephalopod well. In fact, he has earned a reputation among restaurateurs in New York and beyond as a purveyor of some of the most tender octopus to be found anywhere. His secret lies in four machines that thrum away in the back of his store. Each consists of a motor and a stainless-steel basin fitted with paddles that lightly bat the octopuses around in a mix of water, salt, and ice—a process that gently breaks down the creature's notoriously rubbery flesh, rendering it tender while jiggling out any sand or dirt at the same time. "I grew up in Bari, where women would beat the octopus on

the rocks by the sea" to get the same results, Cutrone recalls. "When [the octopuses] come in, they're flat and stringy, but by the time we're finished they curl up and get this look; we call it flowering," he says, proudly showing me a plump octopus with pretty, ringlet-like tentacles. "People have tried using a regular washing machine," he adds, laughing, "but the salt water destroys the machine." The good news

for octopus lovers who don't want to ruin their home appliances is that Cutrone ships his product almost anywhere in the country. Does spending day after day prepping octopus put him off the seafood? "You know what we do here when we don't feel like getting sandwiches?" Cutrone says by way of response. "We open a few octopuses up, put 'em in our George Foreman grill, add lemon juice and oil—delicious." (See THE PANTRY, page 93, for ordering information.) —Rachael Philipps Shapiro



BOOK REVIEW

Alice's Restaurant

A new biography goes deep to tell the story of Chez Panisse

BY IRENE SAX

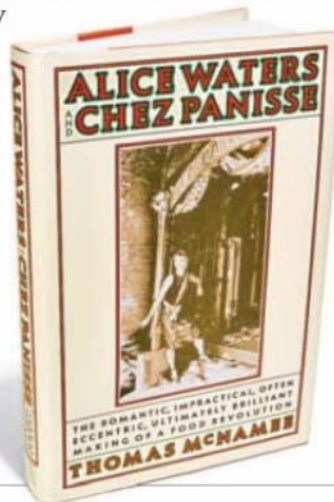
IT'S A CLASSIC STORY. Naïve American girl travels to France, tries the food, and loses her innocence. For me it was Normandy butter. For Alice Waters it was soupe des légumes in a fusty Parisian dining room. One taste, and nothing is ever the same again.

That bowl of soup and the meals that followed changed the direction of Waters's life, which Thomas McNamee ably chronicles in the biography *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse*. This immensely readable book is authorized: that is, Waters's former assistant suggested that McNamee write it, and he was given more or less free access to her papers and friends. Yet it is remarkably unlike the typical, breathlessly laudatory authorized biography, thanks to McNamee's rounded and convincing portrait of a controversial figure in American cooking.

The book makes clear that Waters didn't set out to start a revolution. When she opened Chez

Panisse in Berkeley, California, in 1971, she mostly wanted a place where she and her friends could hang out and eat the kind of fresh, traditional food she'd learned to love in France. With a staff drawn mainly from her acquaintances in the local counterculture, the restaurant barely managed to turn out the first night's \$3.95 prix fixe menu of pâté en croûte, canard aux olives, and plum tart.

Waters's taste and perfectionism defined everything at Chez Panisse, from the shape of the tables to the number of lettuce leaves in a salad. And she had a genius for hiring the right people. Paul Bertolli, Joyce Goldstein, Mark Miller, Judy Rodgers, Deborah Madison, Sally Clarke, and Jonathan Waxman are among the many great American food figures who have cooked at Chez Panisse over the years. But, according to McNamee, the chef who changed it from a very good restaurant to a great one—and who felt he never got enough credit—was Jeremiah Tower, whom Waters hired in



FARE

1973. Handsome, brilliant, a Harvard-trained architect, Tower took over a kitchen that had been featuring country-style foods and started turning out dishes based on French haute cuisine, quickly earning a reputation for what McNamee calls "what-the-hell over-the-topness". Then, in 1976, Tower created his first Northern California Regional Dinner, the menu for which listed the source of each major ingredient. The practice has since become a commonplace, but back then it was news to say your geese came from Sebastopol and your cheese from Sonoma.

Thus the revolution, and the controversy over who sparked it, began; two versions of Waters's story eventually emerged. According to one, Waters invented California cuisine and became America's own Joan of Arc: the enemy of agribusiness and the standard-bearer for a system of moral values and virtuous farming. She invited foragers to bring mushrooms, seafood, and berries into her restaurant kitchen; she encouraged local farmers to grow organic produce; she initiated "teaching gardens" in schools. The other version of the story—the one told in Towers's 2003 culinary memoir *California Dish* (Free Press)—is that Waters is a publicity hound who took credit for work done by many people.

The truth, says McNamee, is more nuanced. Many people were involved in creating Chez Panisse, California cuisine, and the movement toward organic, seasonal, and locally grown foods. But Waters was at the center of it all, an ex-Montessori teacher with an excellent palate, an indomitable will, and the ability to recognize and enlist others who, like her, simply got it.

Certainly she liked the attention, the admiration, and the fame. But the real cause of the pronounced differences of opinion about Alice Waters, McNamee thinks, is a contemporary media culture in which every narrative has to have a savior or a scoundrel.

Just 27 years old when she started Chez Panisse, Waters is now in her 60s and spends little time at the restaurant. Over the years her ideals have become loftier, but she has remained remarkably true to herself. You can hear her sincerity in the simple yet extraordinary recipes, written in anecdotal style in Waters's own words, that McNamee has included in the book. In a voice both hesitant and self-assured, she describes a preparation for anchoïade, an anchovy-based spread. Making the condiment itself is beautifully simple, but Waters doesn't stop there; she describes how the restaurant used to spoon the anchoïade on bread that had been grilled over fresh green pine needles.

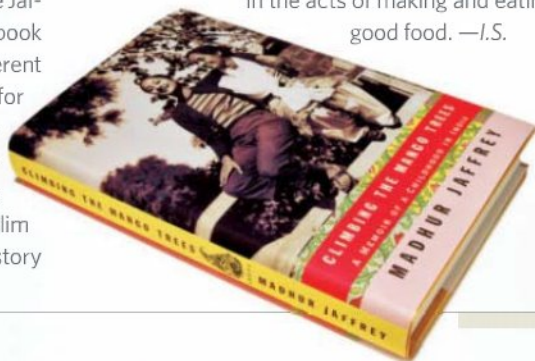
As one who lived through the California revolution from afar, only half aware that anything much was happening, I found the book delightful. For those who know only the latter-day, canonized Alice Waters, the story should be even more compelling, standing as testimony to what can be accomplished with confidence, good taste, unbounded energy, and a knack for making friends with talented people. 

Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution by Thomas McNamee (Penguin Press, \$27.95).

Delhi Memories

Yes, there are descriptions of lovely food in *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India* (Knopf, \$25), Madhur Jaffrey's book about growing up in Delhi: sweet milk foam sprinkled with pistachios; fizzy lemonade in stoppered glass bottles; meatballs seasoned with ginger and coriander; and mouth-tingling chiles strewn over slices of ripe mango taken straight from the tree outside Jaffrey's grandfather's house. But this enjoyable book is not really about food, except insofar as different meals, dishes, and flavors serve as vehicles for Jaffrey's memories. Before she went to England to study drama, the now famous writer and actress lived with her prosperous Hindu family, which had British educations and Muslim cultural leanings. The book, in essence, is the story

of a time when all three cultures could coexist in a single family, just before Partition tore the country in two along religious fault lines. It's a mesmerizing read, not merely because it evokes a golden past but also because it depicts that past through the eyes of a sensitive and spirited girl who saw at an early age the love and personal expression inherent in the acts of making and eating good food. —I.S.



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THE SAVEUR LIST

10 Ways to Eat on Oahu

Think Hawaii's most famous island is all leis and luaus? Think again

BY SHANE MITCHELL

A LOT OF VISITORS TO OAHU find it difficult to see past the plentiful Polynesian-themed hotel buffets, but it pays to look a little closer. It just so happens that Oahu, the most ethnically diverse of the eight major Hawaiian islands, is a culinary nexus that offers an array of food that's both exotic and decidedly

American. No matter where you go on this 600-square-mile island, locals define neighborhoods less by concrete landmarks than by gastro-nomic points of interest, whether they vend taro burgers or kimchi. Here are ten tips we use to follow their lead. (See THE PANTRY, page 93, for more information.)

1 | DO A PLATE LUNCH AT THE COVE

Hawaiian "plate lunches", hot meals served at informal diners and cafés, usually consist of starch-heavy side dishes like fried rice and macaroni salad. But at the no-frills **Sharks Cove Grill**—a panel truck parked across from Pupukea Beach Park, down the road from Waimea Bay, a surfing mecca on Oahu's North Shore—mixed greens and brown rice signal a health-conscious shift in that local tradition. Catering to a surfboard-toting clientele, the propane-powered galley

kitchen also dishes up taro burgers, teriyaki chicken, and excellent grilled ahi kebabs: moist chunks of grilled fresh-caught tuna skewered with roasted red peppers, mushrooms, and onions and slathered in a creamy sesame-shoyu sauce.

2 | FIND YOUR SWEET TOOTH

Oahu's residents love sweets, and neighborhood bakeries thrive all over the island. **Lee's Bakery & Kitchen**, in Honolulu's Chinatown, is famous for its egg custard pie; **Ted's**, in Sunset Beach on the North Shore, and **Sunny Side**, in Wahiawa, are loved for their luscious pudding pies; and the **Dee Lite Bakery**, on Dillingham Boulevard in Honolulu, is known for its spongy guava-filled chiffon cakes. Few other confections, however, inspire as much praise as the coco puffs from **Liliha Bakery**. Since the 1970s, the Takakuwa family has served these two-inch-wide cream puffs, filled with chocolate cream and topped with a dollop of chantilly frosting, at its 24-hour coffee shop, between Honolulu's Kahlihi and Nuuanu districts.

3 | KICK IT OLD-SCHOOL

For a dose of culinary nostalgia, head to **Ono Hawaiian Foods** and be prepared to wait for a table. This hole-in-the-wall restaurant, on Kapahulu Avenue in Honolulu, champions old-fashioned

Hawaiian dishes like tripe stew and day-old poi (boiled taro root paste), which has a distinctive tang similar to that of yogurt. The dining room's walls are plastered with autographed glossies of celebrity patrons. Start by order-

sion of ceviche. Traditionally, raw fish was cut into bite-size morsels and seasoned with seaweed, salt, or a paste made from roasted kukui nut (which is like a macadamia but oilier). These days, there are dozens of variations, sold at



ing bowls of lomi salmon (a side dish of smoked or salted salmon and chopped tomatoes) and pipikaula, a sun-dried beef jerky, which usually disappears into our beach bags for snacking on later. Then try the tender chicken laulau, wrapped and cooked in ti leaves, and the shredded kalua pig, which is baked in a Hawaiian-style clay oven called an *imu*.

4 | GET FRESH

Poke (pronounced POE-KAY or POE-KEE) is the Hawaiian ver-

sion of ceviche. Traditionally, raw fish was cut into bite-size morsels and seasoned with seaweed, salt, or a paste made from roasted kukui nut (which is like a macadamia but oilier). These days, there are dozens of variations, sold at Oahu's supermarkets and top restaurants alike. Poke should be eaten as fresh as possible; that's why folks in the Diamond Head area who crave a pure taste of the sea stop at **Fort Ruger Market**, where the dish is made to order with glistening, ruby-colored cubes of ahi tuna and delicate, emerald green limu seaweed.

5 | THINK INSIDE THE BOX

Despite the incursion of mainland fast-food chains, a take-away meal from an *okazu-ya*,





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FARE



Hawaii's answer to the deli, is still a preferred choice among Oahu denizens for breakfast or lunch on the go. Served in plain Styrofoam boxes, the meals are composed of a selection of prepared foods chosen by the customer from an array of steam trays. The best offerings are those that represent the countries of the Pacific Rim: we crave spicy Philippine longanisa pork sausage (similar to smoky Portuguese linguica) and Chinese chow fun (fried rice noodles, often topped with vegetables). Our favorite *okazu-ya* is **Mitsu-Ken**, where early risers line up at a tiny take-out window for a meal of garlic chicken, pressed egg omelette, and white rice topped with furikake (a dried seaweed and sesame seasoning). Another winner is **Gulick Delicatessen**, whose specialties include tender teriyaki mahimahi and crisp potato tempura.

6 | DISCOVER CHINATOWN

This neighborhood, in down-

town Honolulu—which comprises three covered markets, a few small food manufacturers, and storefront shops and restaurants—has been an established Chinese enclave since 1870; over the years, waves of immigrant workers from other Asian countries have given it a more diverse character. Vendors sell a variety of goods, from kimchi to fresh noodles; fast-food stalls serve pad thai, Vietnamese sandwiches, Korean barbecue, and many other Asian favorites. Stop by **Nam Fong** for expertly prepared roast Chinese-style pork and duck, or take a seat at one of the four tables in the tiny **Green Door Cafe** and order a bowl of laksa, a vibrant Malaysian noodle soup.

7 | DRINK IN THE SUNSET

Of the many places on Oahu where we've lingered while watching the surf roll in, we've found that **House Without a Key**, at the Halekulani Hotel in Waikiki, is one of the few

joints around where genuine aloha spirit lives on. The main nightly attraction at the open-air restaurant, aside from the sunset, is Kanoe Miller, one of Hawaii's finest hula performers. The drinks measure up to the ambience; ask for a Halekulani Sunset: rum, crushed ice, guava juice, and fresh pineapple.

8 | GO HAUTE SANS THE HAUTEUR

Oahu-born chef Wayne Hirabayashi's sunny dining room at **Hoku's**, in the Kahala Hotel & Resort, has expansive views of the shoreline near Koko Head, about 20 minutes east of Waikiki. Fancy flourishes like Christofle chopsticks and imported linens belie the chef's hearty preparations, such as braised pork belly and pancetta-crusted onaga (red snapper). We always order a playful trio of musubi (rice balls) with ahi tuna poke, smoked salmon, and Kona lobster coated with tiny roasted rice crackers. Another draw is the whole, crispy fried opaka (pink snapper)—available only on days when local fishermen happen to snag it.

9 | EAT OFF THE LAND

At the **Kapiolani Community College Farmer's Market**, held every Saturday on the campus parking grounds near Diamond Head Crater, vendors such as North Shore Cattle Company and Nalo Farms, which usually cater directly to island chefs, give the public a chance to buy pasture-raised beef, tatsoi (a Chinese green), daikon, and other locally

grown fare. Stock up on prepared foods like fragrant poha berry jam, pickled mangoes, smoked marlin, and ginger syrup.

10 | CHILL OUT

At **Waiola Shave Ice II**, a storefront on Kapahulu Avenue in Honolulu, you'll find some of the 50th state's best shave ice, a local variety of snow cone. The ice is finely scraped from a huge block into a paper cone and then topped with a choice of 30 flavored syr-



ups, such as litchi, green tea, and passion fruit, many of which are made on the premises. Try a finishing touch of red adzuki beans, mochi balls (tiny rice balls filled with adzuki bean paste), or sweetened condensed milk. Waiola's shave ice has a wonderfully silky texture, but be warned: it melts fast. So, park yourself on one of the benches right outside and get down to business, quickly.



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KITCHENWISE



Nebraska Nirvana

A Midwest native transforms a small-town library into a home

BY C. M. REINHARDT PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL SARTORE

IN 1913, THE WOMEN'S LITERARY CLUB of Burwell, Nebraska, took steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie up on his offer—which he made to towns and cities across America at the turn of the last century—to build a public library free of charge. The brick split-level building served as Garfield County's only library until 2002, when the residents of Burwell, the farming community 170 miles northwest of Omaha where I grew up (that's me, above, with my German shepherd, George), decided to move the collection to a more accommodating

space and left the building abandoned. Two years later, I was the sole bidder at its auction.

Like many buildings in this part of the country, my new, 2,800-square-foot home is unassuming but was built in as grand a fashion as the materials at the time allowed; its large windows and pressed-tin ceilings hint at a restrained sort of opulence. Converting this piece of Burwell's history into a living space took more than two years. As I lived at the time in New York City (where I worked as an executive producer for the Food Network), my plan was to renovate it and use it

KITCHENWISE

as a second home. Mailed correspondence containing hand-drawn plans for plumbing, rewiring, and kitchen design went back and forth between me and the contractors I'd hired. During the times I was able to check on the



renovation in person, I thought about how I could create a modern, functional kitchen without compromising the building's character.

I opted to keep the library's large-scale rooms undivided and build the kitchen in the back corner of the room that once contained the library's stacks. Before construction began, major updates to the building's infrastructure had already drained my budget, forcing me to come up with creative ways to implement my design plans. Two rows of cabinets placed back to back solved the problem of building an expensive custom island. The countertops were covered with Formica because the cost of shipping stone (my first choice) to such a remote location was prohibitive. I found two of the most important pieces for the kitchen, a double Whirlpool oven and an antique card catalogue that now serves as a cupboard and sideboard, at a prop house auction in New York City. Too large to fit in any Manhattan apartment, those pieces were perfect for my new, comparatively large space. The last item I bought was another oversize treasure: an eight-foot-long, 32-inch-high solid wood table discovered at a warehouse furniture store in Brooklyn.

After the table was hauled across the

country and reassembled (and its legs sawed down to a more diner-friendly height), I held my first official gathering, a Fourth of July dinner party with friends from both New York and Nebraska. Two weeks later, realizing I'd fallen in love with my new home and didn't want to be so far away, I took a deep breath and moved back to Burwell full-time to try my hand as a freelance producer and food writer.

In the few months that I've lived here, I've begun to build a new life for myself. A steady trickle of friends and family visits from out of town, usually flying into the airport in Omaha. When the guests arrive, the immense, five-by-nine-foot kitchen island (the size of the entire kitchen in my old apartment) is a hub of activity; it's where we read, talk, do the crossword puzzle, wait for water to boil, or ready provisions for canoe trips on

the nearby Calamus River. The kitchen, like the landscape outside my windows, changes with the seasons: in the fall it became a quasi-industrial space, where I prepared foods in bulk to stock the freezer for the long winter, and in the summer it will probably revert to being a sunny getaway. Sometimes, when the cooking is done, I swear I can still detect the scent of old books. I look around the room and picture what it once was, and I smile at the fact that no one will ever tell me to be quiet here again.

Would you like to share your own kitchen design ideas with other SAVEUR readers?

Send us photos of your kitchen, both overall and in detail, along with your name, address, and a few lines telling us what's special about it. Please note that unused submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned. Our address: Kitchenwise, SAVEUR, 2 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016.



The Road Home (above)

I found this retired road sign at a second-hand store in Burwell and just had to have it. Highway 2, which runs through the Nebraska National Forest, south of Burwell, is my favorite road to drive.

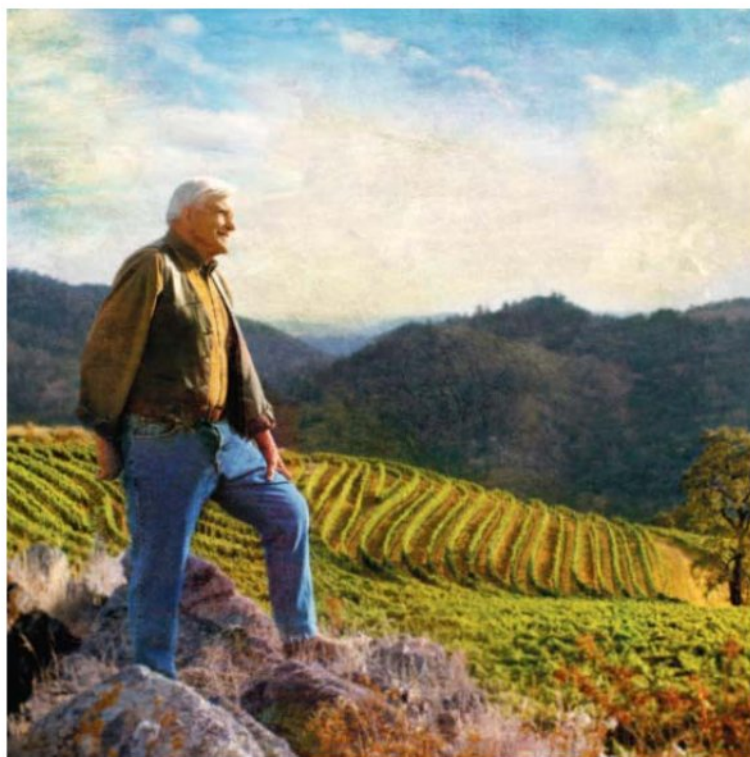
1. Homegrown Heat Because my home's old gas furnace can get the temperature in the living area to only about 60 degrees, I installed a corn stove next to the kitchen. It burns shelled kernels from the local feed store and heats the entire floor for around four dollars a day.

2. A Place for Everything Those librarians were onto something: I use my old card catalogue for storing small items like candles, matchbooks, and my collection of funky bottle openers (pictured); I label the front of each drawer so that I can find what I need.

3. Lean Larder In my new life in rural Nebraska I have to plan carefully to keep my pantry stocked. Our growing and butchering seasons produce large quantities of staples like beef, which I make into stews (in process, pictured) and freeze to eat throughout the winter. For scarcer items like whole coffee beans, maple syrup, and saffron, I rely on my out-of-town friends, who bring those treats when they visit.

4. About Face The original façade of the library, with its wide double doors, is obscured under a new front vestibule added in the 1970s. Now that my interior projects are nearly complete, I look forward to taking on the task of restoring the exterior.





Jess Jackson, Upper Hawkeye Mountain Estate, Alexander Valley



Terroir can be defined as that mystical melding of light, water, soil, air and human touch. It is a definition I often use. The simple fact is, you must have a world-class grape in order to make a world-class wine. And when it comes to grapes, their source, the land is what matters.

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My family and I have made it our life's work to seek out these special places, have the knowledge and respect to work in concert with Mother Nature, then commit to the hard work, expense and patience to steward the wine into the bottle. It is a commitment many in our industry are either unwilling or unable to make. But we are convinced you can and will taste the difference because, ultimately, the wine's distinct personality will reflect its source, the special terroir.

I understand that many of you enjoy the taste of our wines but you aren't sure why. My goal is to help with **A Taste of the Truth.**

CELLAR

French Twist

There's more to Alsatian riesling than what's on the label

BY JOHN LANDSDOWNE

FOR YEARS, wine writers, wine merchants, and sommeliers have trumpeted the virtues of riesling, and it appears that wine drinkers are finally paying attention. Riesling sales in the United States have seen a marked increase in the past couple of years, and German, Californian, and Australian rieslings have acquired unprecedented cachet. France's Alsace region, home to some of the world's most venerated riesling producers, has also benefited from this boom. To choose from among the many excellent Alsatian bottlings available in this country, however, is especially challenging.

Alsatian rieslings have traditionally had a reputation for being bone dry. (The exception tended to be late-harvest wines, which are far sweeter tasting.) But more and more Alsatian producers are now making rieslings in an off-dry style—that is, wines that retain enough residual sugar to exhibit a degree of sweetness. This trend is the result partly of a changing environment—European growing seasons are warmer than ever, making it easier for winemakers in this relatively northern clime to achieve maximal ripeness—and partly of changing tastes: the riper Alsatian wines have begun to receive greater critical acclaim.

Consumers might be more inclined to embrace Alsatian rieslings, however, if they knew exactly what

kind of riesling they were getting in a particular bottle. An off-dry riesling will pair beautifully with powerfully spiced Thai or Indian dishes but not nearly so well with plain grilled fish. Yet, unless the producer's style is readily apparent, there's no way of telling whether the wine is off-dry or dry until the bottle has been uncorked.

A rating system (similar to the one adopted in Germany) in which the label indicates ripeness or sugar level has been talked about for some time, but the Alsatian authorities have yet to execute it. In the absence of collective action, one of Alsace's most esteemed producers, Zind-Humbrecht—a winemaker known for its dry and off-dry wines—has taken the initiative and is now rating its wines using a scale of one to five for sweetness (five being the sweetest). Several domaines make wines only in a dry style; prominent among them are Beyer and Trimbach. As for the many respected producers that craft both off-dry and dry wines—Domaines Boxler and Weinbach, for example—consumers generally have to do a little advance research to know which style they'll be getting. The key, as ever, is a good balance of fruit and acidity. 

Tasting Notes

Here are ten of the top Alsatian rieslings we've recently tasted. See THE PANTRY, page 93, for sources.

ALBERT BOXLER GRAND CRU SOMMERBERG 2004 (\$55). A bouquet of citrus fruits and cumin. Full-bodied and very rich, with a perceptible sweetness. The sweet taste would nicely offset that of a piquant curry.

DOMAINE ERNEST BURN 2002 (\$22). Spiced apples and peaches on the nose, along with some minerality. Rich and ripe on the palate, with clean flavors and a gentle spiciness. A bit plump but an otherwise commendable riesling.

DOMAINE WEINBACH GRAND CRU SCHLOSSBERG CUVÉE STE CATHERINE "L'INÉDIT" 2005 (\$79). A mineral-rich nose, with scents of orange blossom, pineapple, honeysuckle, and flowers. A full-bodied, dense wine whose sweetness is parried by mouth-coating minerality and good, subtle acidity. Decadent and delicious.

DOMAINE WEINBACH GRAND CRU SCHLOSSBERG VENDANGES TARDIVES TRIE SPÉCIALE 2004 (\$120). Creamy, sensational nose of honey, fruit compote, and wildflowers. Succulent fruits come through on the palate, and ample minerality and acidity offset the wine's considerable sweetness. A late-harvest riesling that gains richness after it's been poured, it almost begs to be served with pâté or foie gras.

DOMAINE ZIND-HUMBRECHT 2005 (\$30). A lovely nose of pear, orange blossoms, minerals, and flowers. Fairly lean, with an agreeable austerity. A solid entry-level riesling.

HUGEL JUBILEE 2004 (\$53). Grapefruit, green apple, talc, mint, and honey aromas sail out of the glass. An intensely fruity but dry wine, with a chalky texture and good acidity. It could use a little more depth of flavor but is nonetheless very pleasing as is.

MAISON KUENTZ-BAS CUVÉE TRADITION 2004 (\$15). A terrific bouquet of grapefruit, apple, flowers, and chamomile. Tart grapefruit in the mouth, along with robust minerality, good acidity, and a nice chalky texture. Pleasantly austere, with vivid flavors. A lot of wine for the price.

MARC KREYDENWEISS GRAND CRU KASTELBERG 2004 (\$69). A nose of honey, along with notes of orange blossom, lime, chalk, and white pepper. Full-bodied with lots of honey on the palate, yet bone dry. An interesting, enjoyable wine.

MEYER-FONNÉ GRAND CRU WINECK-SCHLOSSBERG 2005 (\$33). Full-bodied with delicious peach and lemon flavors and a delightful fleshiness to the fruit. Bone dry, with fine acidity and concentration. Some honeysuckle kicks in at the finish.

TRIMBACH CUVÉE FRÉDÉRIC ÉMILE 2003 (\$40). An impressive nose redolent of lime and honeysuckle. Sweetish (but not sweet) white citrus fruit on the palate. Excellent balance and depth, with a superb mineral edge. A terrific wine. —J.L.



TASTE PERFECTION



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LIVES

A Host of Possibilities

The star of a popular Moroccan cooking show has more than just food on her mind

BY KENT DAVIS-PACKARD AND HOLLY SHAFFER



ON THE TILED PATIO OF A VILLA, at the edge of an orange orchard in the southern Atlas Mountains of Morocco, Choumicha Acharki has found precisely what she has been looking for: a recipe. Known throughout the country by her first name (which means little sun in Arabic), Acharki is the cheerful, 35-year-old host of a television cooking show whose title translates as “Delights of My Country”; it has been airing here since 2003. We met and interviewed her while we were working on a film about the history of *mourouzia*, a traditional Moroccan dish, and she invited us to accompany her and her 16-person crew on a two-week shoot for the program’s following season. The journey took us from the white-washed streets of Casablanca, past red earth hills punctuated with jagged trees, to the sandy shores of Agadir and into the heart of southern Morocco.

Acharki sits cross-legged on a brightly patterned woven carpet, stirring almonds that are cooking in an earthenware bowl set over hot coals. Next to her is the guest star of the episode being shot today, Idda Oum El Kheir, a woman of

Berber descent in her 80s, who is renowned in Idda Ougnidif, the village where she lives, for her cooking prowess; she is the chef for most ceremonial events that take place there. Oum El Kheir transfers the roasted almonds to a hand-powered stone grinder. Soon she is adding to the ground almonds a steady stream of oil derived from the nut of the argan tree, an indigenous evergreen. The dish, a sweet, praline-like condiment with a syrupy consistency, is called *amlou* and is often eaten with *berkouks*, a variation on couscous in which the grains have been misted with water and then rolled in semolina flour several times to enlarge them. “You could not imagine an important event, like a marriage, without *amlou* and *berkouks*,” says Acharki. “If these dishes are absent there is no joy.”

Oum El Kheir speaks only Tamazight, known colloquially as Berber, so a young woman named Khadija—who

Choumicha Acharki (left) with Idda Oum El Kheir, above left. Above right, goat and squash tagine, in progress, in Agadir.

KENT DAVIS-PACKARD is getting her Ph.D. in international relations. HOLLY SHAFFER is writing a book about the royal cuisine of Lucknow, India.

LIVES

grew up in the same town—helps with the translation. As the older woman identifies the ingredients, Acharki indicates first the oil, then the almonds and honey, slowly repeating their names aloud so that she may master the pronunciation of the unfamiliar words. Oum El Kheir's demeanor, which has been no-nonsense throughout the taping, visibly softens; she's happy to be educating an outsider in her native tongue.

A FEW DAYS LATER, we rise before the sun and visit a women's argan oil cooperative in the coastal town of Tamanar. Dozens of co-op members are seated on colorful rugs, argan nuts spread out before them. As they break them open with smooth, oval-shaped rocks, the rhythmic sound of their pounding marks our steps. Acharki asks her crew to film the women as they work and then turns her attention to the day's recipes: a spicy dried mussel tagine and a fragrant fish and carrot couscous, prepared by Lalla Aïcha, a woman who lives near the co-op.

When we sit down with Acharki to sample the fish—a dish known as badazz bel hout—we comment about the lush interplay of spices in the sauce. In response, Acharki holds up to our noses some freshly ground cumin, then some coriander, then a thick-skinned salt-preserved lemon—the dish's core seasonings—and talks about the inventiveness of the women who have created such a vivid-tasting cuisine. In a country where roughly 70 percent of females are illiterate, Acharki is determined to document foods from every corner of Morocco, particularly those based on recipes that date back centuries and live on only in the minds of those who cook the dishes.

Married at 18 and the mother of two boys, Acharki earned her college degree in communications and, early in her career, was the host of a radio talk show dedicated to women's issues. A few years later she was asked to host a culinary program with a chef but turned it down because she wanted to do the show on her own. She attributes her assertiveness to her grandmother, who, prior to the 1960s, not only could preserve olives three different ways but also drove a car, a notable achievement in the Casablanca of those days.

The irony of Acharki's being a 21st-century role model to so many young women while still spending most of her time in the kitchen

is not lost on her. "Morocco is in transition. Women's roles here are evolving, but women remain at the center of their family's home life," she says. "My message to them, as well as to men, is that cooking is a pleasure."

Occasionally she features younger guests on the program, women like Latifa el Aïssi, a 35-year-old Moroccan who recently opened an inn on her family's farm, in the mountains south-east of Agadir, and whom we meet halfway through our trip. Despite her youth, El Aïssi is well versed in traditional cuisine and cooks up a calf's feet and chickpea tagine. Later, when the cooking demonstration is over, the crew and Acharki dive in to sop up the dish's gravy with hunks of dark, crusty bread.

TOWARD THE END of our journey, we visit Tiznit, a town on the edge of the Sahara that seems to rise straight up from the parched earth. Acharki has just completed her last interview of the day. As she tastes a boiled egg and date dish that local women serve to their daughters-in-law on the morning after their wedding, she appears a bit withdrawn. Though Acharki is recognized just about everywhere she goes, there are days when she prefers to be more anonymous. Still, her charisma leads young girls all over Morocco to ask her for her autograph, and on her travels cooks willingly reveal their secrets to her.

We are riding with her in her car when she recalls a fish recipe that she once uncovered in Safi, a Moroccan seaport. The dish, served to her by a family whose ancestors had lived in the city for centuries, was an astonishment. Where she would normally have expected to find a fish cooked in a slightly acidic lemon base, she encountered instead a whole sea bass stuffed with a sugary paste of almonds and hazelnuts. Its flavor combination was very unusual, but Acharki persuaded one of her reluctant staffers to take a bite. He was won over. "He said he no longer wanted to eat meat or chicken ever again," she remembers. "He only wanted to eat this fish. It was that good." The other crew members soon joined him at the table.

This particular episode of the show generated great viewer response. Some were skeptical about the dish, but most were curious about how it tasted. Acharki considers the episode particularly successful. "If we are able to accept the differences in dishes, the differences in customs, we can accept the differences in others," she says, looking out at the arid landscape. "People understand." 

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SOURCE

Good as Gold

Cesare Mazzetti's handmade copperware keeps an ancient tradition alive

BY ELISA HERR AND ED SCHOENFELD

COPPER POTS AND PANS HAVE long enjoyed a hallowed status among cooks. They conduct heat evenly and efficiently (heating and cooling nearly twice as fast as aluminum and ten times more speedily than steel), and, with their warm, burnished glow, they are surely the handsomest pieces in any kitchen. Some of the world's finest copper kitchenware is still made by hand in a small workshop located in the central Italian town of Montepulciano.

There, Cesare Mazzetti, a third-generation coppersmith, carries on a centuries-old tradition, handcrafting copperware one piece at a time.

The Mazzetti family's trade began inauspiciously in the late 19th century, when Cesare's grandfather, a farmer named Bernardo, injured himself when he fell out of a tree and was forced to abandon his work.

An amateur metalsmith, he set up shop and also sent his young son, Giuseppe, to apprentice with a local coppersmith known as Ghiotto. When Ghiotto died, in the 1920s, Giuseppe bought his teacher's tools, many of which dated to the mid-1800s, and opened his own workshop to practice his newly mastered trade, which he later passed on to his son, Cesare. Still faithful to the techniques handed down to him, Cesare uses many of his forebears' old stamps, anvils, and forges, even as he continues to experiment with his materials and improve the quality of his products. All cookware from Rinomata Rameria Mazzetti, as

Cesare's company is called, is hand-hammered—a process that hardens the copper, rendering it more durable and extending its life span. For his sturdiest pots and pans, Cesare uses three-millimeter-thick Chilean copper; this gauge is so heavy and costly that it is rarely employed in industrial copperware production.

In addition to pots and pans, the workshop produces items like fish poachers, mixing bowls, and oil cruets. Each is an example of meticulous craftsmanship—and, Cesare is quick to add, every single piece “is made with love”. Prices vary widely depending on the item: a small frying pan goes for \$56, while a large, rimmed saucepan costs \$353, plus shipping. To order, call 39/0578 758753 or visit www.rameria.com.



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CLASSIC

Dream Whip

England's syllabub is a simple but spirited dessert

BY TAMASIN DAY-LEWIS

WHenever I want to evoke the spirit of summer, syllabub, a classic English pudding, is the dessert I invariably make; one spoonful, and I am transported to fields of buttercups and Jersey cows. Despite its elegant appearance (and mysterious name, which some believe combines the words *sille*, for a type of French wine, and *bub*, slang for a bubbling drink), this alcohol-tinged whipped-cream sweet can be traced back to decidedly rustic beginnings. In 16th- and 17th-century England, wily milkmaids aimed streams of warm milk straight from the cow at a bowl already containing some spiced cider or ale and

allowed a curd to form on top, covering the delicious whey underneath. Those early versions were a more liquid affair than the mousseline concoction we generally enjoy today.

Even back then, though, grander kitchens were already dressing up the dish by using thick cream instead of milk and wine in place of ale. In *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelm Digby Kt. Opened*, published in 1669, the distinguished knight offers several recipes, including one from "my Lady Middlesex" that calls for a wine-laden cream into which she beats her "Sack [sherry]...till all appeareth converted into froth". The mixture

is poured into serving glasses and left to stand overnight: "The next day the Curd will be thick and firm above, and the drink clear under it." Sir Digby also recommends garnishing it with a sprig of rosemary or a little bit of lemon peel to "quicken the taste" and sprinkling it with cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, or cloves.

Nowadays, everything is beaten together until it hangs suspended in soft, wispy folds, the alcohol completely incorporated. I prefer to use oloroso sherry (a dark, concentrated variety of the Spanish fortified wine) instead of white wine, as it gives a mellower, less acidic underscoring. Sir Digby's own syllabub recipe calls for the syrup used from the making of dried plums, which he describes as less sweet than

METHOD

Syllabub

(English Sherry-Infused Mousse)

For a variation, Day-Lewis sometimes fills the glasses halfway up with the syllabub, adds a little raspberry purée or a few chopped white peaches or strawberries, and then tops them off with the remaining syllabub, to create a fruity middle section to the dessert. Put $\frac{1}{3}$ cup superfine sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oloroso sherry, 2 tbsp. cognac, 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice, and the zest of 1 lemon into a large bowl. Stir well, then cover and let sit out at room temperature overnight to allow the flavors to meld. Add $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups plus 2 tbsp. cold heavy cream (preferably unhomogenized) and a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg (just "a suspicion", says Day-Lewis) to the sherry mixture and whip with a whisk until soft peaks form. Spoon into 4 glasses and garnish each with a bit of lemon zest and a sprig of rosemary. Serves 4.

fruity. If I'm using it, I like to reduce the syrup, producing an intensely sticky prune juice, and add eau de vie de prune instead of cognac.

Regardless of which spirit and wine you choose, it's best to leave them to macerate overnight with the lemon juice and sugar for the flavors to develop, though if I am in need of an instant, refreshing treat, I just whisk everything together in one swift burst. When made with proper rich Jersey cream, superfine sugar (which I keep in a jar with vanilla pods, to suffuse the sugar with their tempting aroma), unwaxed lemons, sherry, and good cognac, syllabub is at once the most sophisticated and the humblest of sweets. The dish was popular in England until the second half of the 19th century, after which it languished a bit until its spirited revival over the past 50 years. To my mind, it transcends fashion; it is a dessert that my two daughters can now set their hand to as well as any Hardy milkmaid. 🍷



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Customers at Tacometro, above, in the heart of El Mercado de la Merced. Facing page, delivering a shipment of limes.

A photograph of a person from the waist down, wearing a striped shirt and blue pants, pushing a blue hand truck. The truck is heavily loaded with green produce, likely avocados, which are visible through a mesh netting. The person is walking on a reddish-brown dirt or paved surface. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the same produce and the person's legs.

LAMERCED

A VISIT TO MEXICO CITY'S SPRAWLING CENTRAL MARKET MAKES FOR A HOMECOMING LIKE NO OTHER

ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT YET SEVEN in the morning, for Arnulfo González this is rush hour. A stout man with chalk white hair and a weathered face, he is the cook and owner of Migas Arnulfo, a small eatery deep within Mexico City's Mercado de la Merced, one of the oldest and largest markets in Latin America. His specialty is migas, a hearty breakfast soup made of slow-cooked pork bones and day-old bread.

"Give me one for 17," says a man wearing a red soccer sweatshirt sitting beside me at one of the communal tables, referring to a bowl of migas that costs 17 pesos, about \$1.50.

I order the 14-peso version. Moments later I am handed an earthenware bowl brimming with the soup. I take a sip. It is warm and savory, with a comforting porridgelike consistency. As González brings me a cup of aromatic café de olla (coffee brightened with piloncillo—Mexico's raw sugar—and cinnamon), he advises, "Hay que chupar el hueso! [You have to (continued on page 42)]

BY MAURICIO VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS





A view of the nave mayor, La Merced's produce market.

MEXICO CITY MARKET

suck the bone!]" Following his lead, I understand why: the marrow, which melts succulently from each piece, has a buttery flavor that counters the bite of the chile-spiked broth.

All around me, La Merced, as the market is locally known, is coming to life. An elderly vendor arranges a small mountain of tomatoes; teenage waitresses take orders for tacos at food stalls. Though I grew up in Mexico City and visited La Merced often as a child, usually in the company of my mother, who shopped here, I haven't come back in almost two decades. I now live in New York City, where shopping usually means buying food from the local supermarket. I take another sip of the migas, glad that I have decided to return.

AT ONCE overwhelming and exhilarating, La Merced is Mexico City's heart and soul. A place almost sacred to many of the some 19 million people who live in the city's metropolitan area, it consists of seven massive buildings that extend like a city within a city across about 113 acres, an area equivalent to 85 football fields. In reality, it is impossible to determine where La Merced begins and ends. While more than 5,000 stalls officially occupy the market, scores of itinerant vendors spill onto the streets and alleys surrounding it.

At La Merced's core is a produce market, housed in a hangarlike structure known as the *nave mayor*. Stalls selling vegetables and fruits like limes, fresh and dried chiles, carrots,

beans, nopales (prickly pear cactus paddles), nuts, and guavas line its labyrinthine corridors. I once heard someone say that many vendors arrange their displays of tomatillos, onions, and tomatoes so that they mirror the colors and design of the Mexican flag. Around the produce stalls, the scents of fresh cilantro and epazote mix with the aromas of cooked delicacies emanating from shops like González's.

Six smaller markets connect to the *nave mayor* through narrow pathways. Those passages are lined with vendors offering

**THE MARKET
IS THE CITY'S
HEART AND
SOUL, AND A
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IN JOYOUS
CHAOS**

such diverse goods as flowers, candies, handicrafts, and kitchen supplies. Situated across a small street from the market's core is the *nave menor*, a smaller structure that houses a butchers' market, where merchants sell all manner of cuts from cows, goats, and pigs, as well as an astonishing array of local-style meat products, including chicharrón prensado (pressed blocks of pork skin cooked with tomato and spices). I remember being very careful about where I stepped when I came to this part of La Merced as a child.

La Merced is a daily exercise in choreographed chaos. Walking around after breakfast, I dodge a small army of men sprinting down the crowded aisles with

sacks of dried chiles slung over their shoulders. No sooner have I let them pass than a shrill whistle startles me, causing me to leap out of the way of a *diablero*, or hand-truck driver, who whizzes past pushing a ten-foot-tall stack of egg crates; before I can collect myself, another one speeds in the opposite direction balancing a tower of garlic. Amid the whistles and shouts, a young woman moves gracefully through the corridors carrying a box bursting with yellow squash blossoms, smiling politely at the various attentions offered by the men she passes.

I am on the hunt for a guiso, or savory stew, called verdolagas con carne de puerco (purslane and pork)—one of my favorite Mexican foods, which I am rarely able to find outside the country. An herb vendor directs me to Josefina González, a woman in her 40s with big, kind eyes, who sells food to other market vendors out of a stall the width of my outstretched arms. She is finishing up her preparation of the various dishes she'll serve today—chiles rellenos (stuffed peppers), costilla de cerdo con habas (pork ribs with beans), and posole (hominy and pork stew). When I tell her how much I love the dish and that I haven't eaten it for years, she agrees to prepare it for me. She sends a woman who works for her to procure the ingredients, all of which are available nearby.

Later, I sample Josefina's version; it is as good as the ones I ate growing up. The subtle bitterness of the purslane gives way to the tang of the tomatillo broth. For the second time in two hours I find myself partaking in the primitive, nourishing act of gnawing on a pork bone. I leave the stall a happy man.

METHOD

Salsa de Tres Chiles

(Three-Chile Salsa)

For a source for hard-to-find Mexican ingredients, see **THE PANTRY**, page 93. Slit 6 dried guajillo chiles, 6 dried mora chiles, and 6 dried árbol chiles from top to bottom. Remove and discard stems and most of the seeds. Heat a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat; cook each chile, pressing it down firmly and flipping once, until lightly toasted, 3–5 seconds on each side. Transfer chiles to a plate. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, add chiles, 1 small whole tomato, 3 cloves garlic, and 1/2 small white onion, reduce heat to medium, and simmer, removing each ingredient as it becomes tender, 3–4 minutes for tomato, 5–6 minutes for onion, 10–12 minutes for chiles and garlic. Purée the vegetables and chiles with 1/4 cup water in a food processor into a coarse salsa. Season with salt to taste. Serve with the squash blossom quesadilla (see page 45), if you like. Makes 2 cups.

Ensalada de Nopales

(Cactus Salad)

To clean prickly pear cactus paddles, which bristle with thorns, grip them by their base and shave off the spines with a knife held flush against the paddles. (Protect your hands with paper towels or rubber gloves.) Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add 5 trimmed cleaned coarsely chopped medium cactus paddles (about 1 1/2 lbs.; see page 93), reduce heat to medium, and boil until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain paddles and rinse; transfer to a bowl. Add 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, 2–3 tbsp. fresh lime juice, 1 thinly sliced small white onion, 1 finely chopped clove garlic, 1 stemmed seeded finely chopped jalapeño, and salt to taste; stir well. Transfer salad to a platter and top with 1 medium cored sliced tomato, 2/3 cup crumbled queso fresco (see page 93), and 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro. Refrigerate for 1 hour. Serves 4.

MAURICIO VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN's last article for **SAVEUR** was "The Mother of Mexican Cuisine" (December 2005).

Facing page, clockwise from top left: three-chile salsa in a *molcajete*, or Mexican mortar; cactus salad; cutting the spines off nopales, or prickly pear cactus paddles, which are delivered to the market in tall stacks.





MEXICO CITY MARKET

METHOD

Esquites

(Corn with Lime Juice and Chile Powder)

This spicy corn snack, popular in Mexico City and its environs, is often topped with mayonnaise. The word *esquites* is derived from an indigenous Mexican word for toasted corn, *izquiltl*. For a source for hard-to-find Mexican ingredients, see *THE PANTRY*, page 93. Combine 6 cups fresh white corn kernels (from about 10 ears), 3 tbsp. butter, 1 stemmed seeded finely chopped serrano chile, torn leaves from 1 stalk fresh epazote (optional), and 1½ cups water in a medium pot. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, covered, until tender, 10–15 minutes. Set aside to let corn and its cooking liquid cool slightly. Add 1 cup crumbled queso fresco, 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice, ½ tsp. powdered piquin chiles, and salt to taste and toss well. Divide corn and liquid between cups. Serves 6.

Quesadilla de Flor de Calabaza

(Squash Blossom Quesadilla)

Delicate flores de calabaza (squash blossoms) are delicious in quesadillas, soups, and tacos or simply battered and fried on their own. Top one 8" flour tortilla with ½ cup grated queso oaxaca, a creamy Mexican string cheese (see page 93). Trim 5 fresh squash blossoms and remove and discard their stamens. Arrange squash blossoms over the cheese, overlapping them slightly. Top with another ½ cup grated queso oaxaca and a second tortilla. Heat 1 tbsp. canola oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Cook quesadilla, flipping once, until cheese is melted and quesadilla is golden brown on both sides, 4–5 minutes in all. Transfer to a plate, cut into quarters, and serve immediately, with three-chile salsa (see page 42), if you like. Serves 1.

As I continue wandering, I am struck by how little La Merced has changed in the nearly 20 years since I was last here. It's true that the market, like Mexico City itself, is bigger and more frenetic now, but in virtually every other respect, La Merced seems to have resisted the modernizations—from shopping malls to double-decker expressways—visited upon the rest of the city in recent years.

Indeed, while I love the intensity of the place, it is nostalgia that has brought me back here. In addition to the migas, at La Merced I can find other foods and ingredients I remember from childhood that I can't readily find in the United States, such as ensalada de nopales, a soothing salad of prickly pear cactus paddles; esquites, a corn snack; and huauzontles, two-foot-long broccoli-like greens that my mother used to batter and fry and then top with a pasilla chile sauce. La Merced embodies all the things I miss about my native city: the food, of course, but also its remarkable intimacy in the midst of commotion. Here, almost anyone I approach warmly engages me in conversation.

MEXICO HAS A centuries-old tradition of open-air markets whose extent has never been replicated in the lands to the north. According to the chronicles of the 16th-century Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, an immense Aztec marketplace called Tlatelolco sat on a spot not far from present-day La Merced; it is said that Tlatelolco attracted thousands of people a day to its stalls. The market's current incarnation began to take shape in 1863, when vendors set up shop at the site of a former convent,

from which La Merced—the word *merced* means mercy—took its name. By 1940, hundreds of fixed and mobile stalls had spread haphazardly across the surrounding 53 city blocks. In September 1957, in a massive undertaking intended to consolidate vendors, the market was relocated to the historic downtown part of the city, where it stands today.

Ángela Chamorro, in her late 50s, runs a lunch counter directly opposite the doors of the subway exit that now stands in the center of the *nave mayor*, and though she presides over what could be considered the best real estate in

LA MERCED EMBODIES WHAT I MISS ABOUT MY NATIVE CITY: THE FOOD—AND THE INTIMACY

La Merced, she says she misses the old market, which she first came to know when she moved to Mexico City with her parents when she was eight years old.

"There was a fountain here then instead of the Metro station," she tells me, as I take a seat at the counter. Other lunch patrons squeeze in at the five long tables to the right. Chamorro's daughters and nieces, who work at the establishment, engage in loud repartee with customers as orders start flying in.

"I have 12 siblings," Chamorro says cheerfully, "so I'm never short of staff!"

I watch her drop a handful of guajillo, mora, and árbol chiles into a large pot of boiling water to

make the three-chile salsa that will be served with her tacos, quesadillas, and huaraches (foot-long, oval-shaped tortillas topped with salsa, onions, and cheese). Each day, Chamorro cooks hundreds of each on her griddle and garnishes them to order with chorizo, cecina (dried beef or pork), and squash blossoms. Eating Chamorro's quesadillas and huaraches is a messy business, and I set to it with gusto.

LATER, I RETRACE my steps (no easy feat in La Merced) and return to Arnulfo González's migas stall, this time for conversation, not food; I've already eaten enough to get me through to breakfast tomorrow. He invites me to sit at one of the tables out front. He wipes his forehead with a handkerchief; it's been a long day.

"My parents were peasants," he tells me, "and the first time I wore shoes I was 14 years old, when we came to Mexico City from San Felipe del Progreso [a nearby town]." González says he started selling migas in 1964 on the sidewalk a few blocks away from La Merced and, later, from the entryway to his home. Business boomed. "I had so many customers that people couldn't fit in the small space—I was arrested 25 times!" he says. After those repeated brushes with the law, González moved to La Merced. These days he serves more than a hundred bowls of stew each day, and he takes pride in having a fiercely loyal clientele.

We talk about the future of his business and of La Merced. Despite the fact that UNESCO named the historic district encompassing La Merced a World Heritage site in 1987, the market faces some daunting challenges, posed by a changing economic landscape. For one thing, produce and packaged foods can increasingly be found at lower prices (*continued on page 49*)

Facing page, clockwise from top left: corn with lime juice and chile powder; a squash blossom quesadilla, a popular snack at La Merced; a market worker takes a break from unloading produce.



Maiz azul (blue corn), used to make tortillas. Facing page, verdolagas con carne de puerco is a savory stew based on purslane and pork.





A vendor of nuts, dried fruits, and grains greets shoppers at his stall in La Merced.

MEXICO CITY MARKET

at establishments like Wal-Mart (of which there are more than 100 in Mexico). But González doesn't appear particularly worried. With a nod of his head, he draws my attention to a young couple enjoying bowls of his stew at the next table over.

"Do you see that guy?" he asks. "He used to come here with his parents when he was a little boy. Today he comes with his girlfriend, and one day they will have children, and they will bring them here for migas." I hope that's true, I tell him. One thing is certain: I'll be back, and this time I don't intend to wait so long. 

THE PANTRY, page 93: Sources for Mexican chiles, prickly pear cactus, queso fresco, epazote, powdered piquín chiles, queso oaxaca, and purslane.

METHODS

Verdolagas con Carne de Puerco

(Purslane and Pork Stew)

Put 2½ lbs. pork spareribs cut into 3" pieces, 2 cloves garlic, ½ chopped white onion, and 2½ quarts water into a pot; boil. Reduce heat; simmer until tender, 2 hours. Strain broth, reserving pork and 6 cups broth; discard garlic and onions. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add 4 dried stemmed árbol chiles (see page 93) and 2 lbs. husked tomatillos; cook until soft, 10–12 minutes. Transfer tomatillos and chiles to a blender with ½ chopped white onion, 2 cloves garlic, and ½ cup water; purée and set aside. Return water to a boil; add 2 lbs. coarsely chopped purslane; cook until soft, 3–5 minutes. Drain. Brown pork in 2 tbsp. oil in a pot over medium-high heat, 4–5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and add tomatillo purée; cook until thickened slightly, 8–10 minutes; transfer to pot with broth. Add cooked purslane and salt to taste. Simmer until pork is falling off the bone, about 30 minutes. Serves 4–6.

THE GUIDE

MEXICO CITY

COUNTRY CODE: 52

EXCHANGE RATE: 11 pesos = \$1

Benito Juárez International Airport is about ten miles east of the city's historic center. Registered taxi companies provide direct transportation from the airport to hotels. For taxis within city limits, it's a good idea to avoid the sometimes unreliable unlicensed cabs that roam the streets and have your hotel concierge call you a cab instead.

WHERE TO STAY

CAMINO REAL MÉXICO Mariano Escobedo 700, Colonia Anzures (55 5263 8888; www.caminoreal.com). Rates: rooms \$200–\$285. With its seven restaurants, two bars, and an array of gardens, fountains, and patios, this expansive, sleek hotel in Mexico City's Polanco neighborhood is a classy urban oasis.

CONDESA DF avenida Veracruz 102, Colonia Condesa (55 5241 2600; www.condesadf.com). Rates: \$175–\$395. Located in the Condesa neighborhood—known for its Art Nouveau buildings and some of the city's most fashionable galleries and restaurants—this chic, 40-room hotel has a beautiful central courtyard. The rooftop sushi bar offers champagne and sake cocktails along with a breathtaking view of the nearby Parque España.

HOTEL GENEVE CIUDAD DE MÉXICO avenida Londres 130, Colonia Juárez (55 50 800 800; www.hotelescalinda.com.mx). Rates: \$90–\$120. This colonial-style hotel is in the heart of the Zona Rosa, a lively, pedestrians-only area of the city teeming with boutiques, restaurants, and a host of nightlife destinations.

HOTEL HABITA avenida Presidente Masaryk 201, Colonia Polanco (55 5282 3100; www.hotelhabita.com). Rates: \$195–\$315. Minimalist in style, this 36-room hotel is situated within walking distance of some of the finest restaurants and shops in Mexico City. At the hotel's Aura restaurant, chef Oscar Sánchez serves smart dishes like huitlacoche (corn fungus) ravioli and tamarind shrimp.

SHERATON CENTRO HISTÓRICO avenida Juárez 70, Colonia Centro (55 5130 5300; www.starwoodhotels.com). Rates: \$130–\$300. This stalwart hotel is located in the city's historic district near the *zócalo* (central square), where visitors and locals alike congregate at all hours to shop and eat. You'll also be near the Metropolitan cathedral, the presidential palace, and the Palacio de Bellas Artes, a museum and concert hall that features an impressive collection of murals by Mexico's most famous 20th-century artists.

WHERE TO EAT
IN LA MERCED

The fastest and easiest route to the center of El Mercado de la Merced is the Metro, Mexico City's subway. Take the Pink Line to La Merced station, located roughly in the center of the *nave mayor* (the market's main structure). Food stalls in the market are numbered, but there are no official market maps or guides, so the best way to find good places to eat is by asking other people for recommendations—and following the tempting aromas. Here are some suggestions to get you started. (Note: The price

of a meal at La Merced rarely exceeds \$2.25.)

At the Mercado de Comidas, just across the street to the northwest of the *nave mayor*, you'll find an array of small, counter-style eateries and tortilla-making operations. For breakfast, order migas (a rustic bread soup) at **MIGAS ARNULFO** (Stand #171) or caldo de pollo (a robust chicken stew that diners season with limes, which are placed in bowls at every table) at any of the nearby stalls. Several adjacent stalls also sell a range of jugos—freshly squeezed juices made from oranges, strawberries, papayas, mangoes, guavas, and other fruits.

For lunch, have a fixed-price home-style meal known as a *comida corrida*—which includes soup, rice, beans, a main course, and dessert—at **COMIDA CORRIDA CHELY** (Stand #33).

For the best huaraches in La Merced, look no farther than Ángela Chamorro's eatery, **TACOMETRO** (Stand #24), in the *nave mayor*, situated just outside of the La Merced station. The selection of toppings for these messy, satisfying snacks made of masa includes chorizo, eggs, zucchini blossoms, puerco al pastor (marinated rotisserie pork), and bistec (grilled steak). Additionally, there are more than 20 eateries in the bustling nearby area that sell a variety of antojitos (snacks), including quesadillas, tacos, and tamales. Try the squash blossom, mushroom, or corn fungus quesadillas, and if you're feeling decadent, go for the tacos filled with sesos (cows' brains).

For restaurants outside the market, see Rick Bayless's Mexico City dining guide (www.saveur.com/mexicocity), originally published in the January/February 2007 issue of **SAVEUR**.

Toss & Serve

Salads aren't merely a light repast. They tell the story of who we are

By Barbara Kafka Photographs by André Baranowski

I LOVE SALAD. WHEN OTHER people are eating a sandwich or pasta, I am eating salad. Give me a warm day—even not so warm—and salad is my meal. I love it any time of year but especially when the garden behind my home beckons with rows of tender, flavorful baby lettuces, from copper-colored ones to the palest greens. I dress them ever so lightly and sometimes top them with a flourish of herbs. In the late summer and fall, I like heartier salads of escarole and curly endive. In the winter, I put my gastronomic credentials on the line by embracing iceberg lettuce, clean tasting and eternally crisp.

Apple pie deserves its due, but in truth it is salad that has represented, perhaps more definitively than any other food, American attitudes toward eating and cooking. The salads that have come into and, in some cases, gone out of vogue over the years are telling reflections of American tastes at a given moment in time, from mid-20th-century curiosities like marshmallow salad and poinsettia salad (the latter being a ball of cream cheese topped with French dressing and served over pineapple slices and canned pimiento) to perennially satisfying national classics like the caesar and the cobb to contemporary





SALADS

Apple pie deserves its due, but it is salad that truly represents the way America eats

favorites like the tri-colore, a mixture of red, green, and white lettuces like arugula, radicchio, and belgian endive. Salad tells us about the roles of women in this country—who went from being farm wives to being busy professionals—and about how much our eating habits, from the order of courses to our obsession with dieting, have changed over the decades. Salad tells the story of food in America. It is who we are.

ALTHOUGH SALAD AS WE KNOW IT now seems to be an inevitable part of the American meal, it hasn't always been so. The practice of assembling fresh greens (for a glossary of popular greens, see page 54) and vegetables or, sometimes, fruit, cooked meats, eggs, or shellfish on a plate and adding dressing evolved over time, responding to changing tastes and—just as important—to the influence of other countries' cuisines. First and foremost, I give bows to the French, whose cooking continues to inform ours and who have traditionally served, in bistros and other informal restaurants, a small lettuce salad, often in a glass bowl, after the main course.

The simple *salade verte*, that progenitor of countless other green salads, is most often made with soft, mild lettuces such as boston or butter lettuce, and dressed with a vinaigrette, often with mustard added as an emulsifier. It was presumably an affection for this *de rigueur* end-of-meal salad that caused my French friends, after their tours of America in the '60s, to throw up their hands in horror and exclaim, "Can you believe it? They serve the salad before the meal!" At the time, I didn't have the heart to point out to them that not only do we serve salads prior to the main course but sometimes they *are* the main course.

My friends' indignation notwithstanding, it wasn't long before the French themselves were occasionally serving a substantial first-course salad, usually a *salade gastronomique*, of haricots verts, foie gras, and crayfish or the like. Indeed, in the south of France, a tradition of more-filling salads already existed—witness the *salade niçoise*, that sturdy combination of tuna, potatoes, and yet more haricots verts.

On the other shore of the Mediterranean and across the Middle East, a rich tradition of salads and saladlike dishes has long been in place and, in recent decades, has heavily influenced American menus. Accompani-

BARBARA KAFKA, the author of numerous cookbooks, including *Roasting: A Simple Art* (Morrow, 1995), will receive a lifetime achievement award this month from the James Beard Foundation. This is her first article for SAVEUR.

METHODS

Spinach Salad with Hot Bacon Dressing

The ancestor of this dish (previous page) is German potato salad. During the 19th century (and perhaps before), German-Americans used the flavorful dressing to coat dandelion greens. In the States, the bitter greens were eventually supplanted by spinach. Wash and trim 1 lb. spinach; transfer to a bowl. Cook 6 roughly chopped strips bacon in a small pot over medium-high heat, stirring often, until crisp, 8–10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to a paper towel-lined plate. Add 2 finely chopped shallots to pot with bacon fat and cook until just softened, 1–2 minutes. Whisk in 1/3 cup malt vinegar, 1 tbsp. dijon mustard, 2 tsp. sugar, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Continue whisking until heated, about 30 seconds. Pour immediately over spinach and toss; sprinkle with crumbled bacon, 1/2 cup chopped fresh chives, and 2 tbsp. chopped fresh savory. Serves 4–6.

Watercress Salad with Ranch Dressing

Ranch dressing was originally sold by its inventor, Steve Henson, as a seasoning packet that contained, among other ingredients, dehydrated garlic, dehydrated onion, black pepper, and dried parsley; all cooks had to do was add mayonnaise and buttermilk. Our version (facing page) uses fresh herbs, but fresh garlic and onion won't do: only the dried powders produce this dressing's characteristic flavor. Put 1/2 cup buttermilk, 1/2 cup sour cream, 1/2 cup mayonnaise, 1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh chives, 1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, 1 tsp. garlic powder, 1/2 tsp. onion powder, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste into a bowl; stir well. Arrange 2 lightly packed cups trimmed and washed watercress, 3 cherry tomatoes, and a few thin cucumber slices on a salad plate. Drizzle some of the dressing over the top. (Reserve remaining dressing for another use.) Serves 1.

ments to a meal in many Mediterranean countries include dishes like tabbouleh (bulgur wheat with lemon and parsley) and tsatsiki, a cooling mixture of cucumbers and yogurt. Similarly, we have come to embrace a wealth of Asian salads, like those of Thailand composed of grilled beef or shrimp and dressed with lime juice and fish sauce, as well as those of Latin American countries, which encompass everything from fresh fruit to cactus, beans, and corn.

Still, when looking at the broader history of American salad, it's useful to circle back to Europe—to the French (of course), to the Germans (think of potato salad), and, perhaps most significantly, to the English. The first English book on the subject of salads was *Acetaria: A Discourse of Sallets* by John Evelyn, published in 1699. It is remarkably comprehensive, covering a wide variety of edible plants, and also prescient of trends to come centuries later, in that it lists the health-giving properties of various greens. The idea that raw vegetables and greens could be good for people (continued on page 57)



SALADS

A GUIDE TO GREENS

1 | CURLY ENDIVE

Curly endive, a member of the *Cichorium endivia* group, is easy to confuse with more delicate frisée (they're the same plant; frisée is cultivated by different techniques). Both have long, spindly leaves with frayed ends. Growers achieve the mix of pale inner leaves and darker green tips and outer leaves by tying the tops of the heads closed as they mature. The slightly bitter leaves of curly endive taste best when drizzled with a bold dressing like ranch or tempered with a hot bacon dressing.

2 | BUTTERHEAD LETTUCE

One of the five main types of leafy greens of the *Lactuca sativa*, or lettuce, species (the others are loose-leaf, crisphead, batavian, and romaine), butterhead lettuces include boston and bibb (named after a 19th-century Kentucky vegetable grower) and can be identified by their supple, rounded leaves. Heirloom varieties include grandpa admire's; a reddish French lettuce called merveille des quatre saisons; and one of the oldest, tennis ball, a favorite of Thomas Jefferson's. The sweet, delicate flavor of these lettuces is best brought out when they're tossed sparingly with a tart dressing or a vinaigrette.

3 | ESCAROLE

Cultivated in ancient Egypt, this member of the endive family has been grown in the U.S. since the early 19th century. The splayed-leaf heads have broad, ruffled leaves

that range in color from pale yellow to dark green; the most prized heads have a larger proportion of pale, inner leaves. Also called batavian or broad-leaf endive, pleasantly bitter escarole is good in salads with apples, toasted nuts, and blue cheese or with a creamy mustard dressing.

4 | WATERCRESS

In the fourth century B.C., Greek soldiers ate this tender green as a tonic, and the Romans believed it could cure baldness. Part of the plant's Latin name, *nasturtium*, translates as nose twister, a reference to its pungency (it's part of the mustard family). Succulent with a peppery bite when young, watercress can become unpleasantly hot and tough as it matures; if you can, taste before buying. Use watercress (including the flavorful stems) in salads—pairing it with ingredients both salty and sweet—or serve it unadorned alongside grilled meats and fish.

5 | ICEBERG LETTUCE

Iceberg, a type of crisphead lettuce, earned its name in the 1920s; it was the first commercially grown lettuce durable enough to be packed in ice and shipped long distances. The satisfying crunch and wilt-resistant character of these tightly compacted heads more than make up for iceberg's understated flavor. Cultivars such as ice queen, webb's wonderful, and red iceberg have similar characteristics but more flavor. Serve as a wedge, napped with thousand island or another thick, creamy dressing. Iceberg is also good in chopped or shredded salads.

6 | RED LEAF LETTUCE

This loose-leaf lettuce is an example of what some gardeners call cut-and-come-again lettuces because the leaves can be harvested multiple times in a single season. The leaves range in appearance from bronze to maroon, with smooth, crenellated,

or ruffled edges. Names to look for are red sails, red oak leaf, red salad bowl, and the frilly variety lolita rossa. At its prime, red leaf is tender, with a mellow, grassy flavor; toss this colorful lettuce with herbs and simple vinaigrettes.

7 | DANDELION GREENS

Wild dandelion (*Taraxicum officinale*) grows almost everywhere in the world. Foragers collect it in the early spring when the leaves are very tender. The name comes from the French *dent de lion* (lion's tooth), a reference to the jagged shape of the foliage—though today the French call dandelion *pissenlit*. With its pungent, earthy flavor, dandelion adds good contrast to a mixed salad when used in small amounts. Tangy cheese, such as goat or blue, and roasted-nut oils pair nicely with the vivid-tasting dandelion.

8 | ROMAINE LETTUCE

With its crunchy, thick ribs and long, slender leaves, romaine lettuce is prized for its texture and mild, celery-like flavor. Romaine was originally called (and sometimes still is) *cos*, from the Arabic word for lettuce. Red romaine, paris white, lettuce balloon, and crisp mint (so named because of its serrated leaves, which resemble spearmint's) are varieties of romaine with similar attributes. Essential for a proper caesar, romaine's sturdy leaves welcome any creamy or pungent dressing.

—Molly Stevens







SALADS

The idea that raw greens and vegetables are good for you hasn't always been a given

METHODS

Chef's Salad with American French Dressing

This recipe for chef's salad (facing page) is based on one developed by Louis Diat, onetime chef at New York's Ritz-Carlton Hotel and purported inventor of the dish. Put 3 tbsp. ketchup, 3 tbsp. red wine vinegar, 1 tbsp. sugar, 1 tsp. dry mustard, 1/2 tsp. paprika, a pinch of white pepper, and 1 egg yolk into a bowl; whisk well. Slowly drizzle in 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil while whisking constantly until smooth. Season with salt to taste; set dressing aside. Spread 3 lightly packed cups chopped mixed escarole, green leaf lettuce, and iceberg on a salad plate. Arrange 1/4 cup julienned smoked ham, 1/4 cup julienned cooked beef tongue, 1/4 cup thinly sliced boiled chicken breast, and half a hard-cooked egg on top of greens. Tuck 1 cup lightly packed trimmed watercress into center. Drizzle with some of the dressing. (Reserve remaining dressing for another use.) Serves 1.

Mixed Green Salad with Green Goddess Dressing

The dressing for this salad (right) is named for *The Green Goddess*, a stage play popular in the 1920s. Using a vegetable peeler, strip long ribbons from a peeled carrot; transfer to a bowl of ice water to let curl. Combine 1/2 cup mayonnaise, 1/2 cup sour cream, 1/4 cup roughly chopped chives, 1/4 cup roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley, 1 tbsp. tarragon vinegar, 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice, 1 1/2 tsp. finely chopped tarragon, 2 anchovy filets, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste in a food processor; purée until smooth. Drain carrots and toss together in a bowl with 2 lightly packed cups torn boston lettuce, chicory, and romaine. Add some of the dressing to greens and gently toss. (Reserve remaining dressing for another use.) Serves 1.



had often been met with suspicion, in England and elsewhere, and boiling them was frequently the most popular means of preparation because it was thought that in their uncooked form they were hard to digest.

SALAD MAKING IN AMERICA dates to the early days of European settlement. Thomas Jefferson, one of our most serious gardeners, left us his own catalogue of early salad ingredients in his *Garden Book*, a lovingly detailed horticultural diary that documented the found-

ing father's investigations in gardening from 1766 to 1824; it was compiled and published by Edwin Morris Betts in 1944. Lettuce first appears in a 1767 entry. By 1774, Jefferson was planting radicchio di pistoia and wild endive. In 1813 he gave an extensive list of salad greens and lettuces. A few years later, in 1824, in *The Virginia House-wife*, Mary Randolph describes a simple salad made from greens taken from the garden.

By the late 19th century, as salads became ever more popular, restaurants began to include them on menus in numbers and presentations—many of them European in origin—previously unimagined. In *The Epicurean*, a cookbook published in 1894, Charles Randhofer, the chef at New York's Delmonico restaurant, (continued on page 61)

RAISING THE BAR

It's a peculiarly American ritual: arriving at a restaurant, shedding our coats and purses, and then traipsing eagerly to the salad bar to load our plates with all manner of greens, vegetables, croutons, garbanzo beans, bacon bits, hard-cooked eggs, sprouts, cold cuts, crackers, and dressings. An abundant salad bar exemplifies America's individualized, do-it-yourself ethic: everybody eats what he or she wants—and as much as he or she wants. The salad bar perpetuates any number of self-serve dining traditions, from the Swedish smörgåsbord to the buffet-style food stalls ubiquitous in South-

east Asia. But some of the first American salad bars, direct forerunners of those we know today, emerged in the 1930s and '40s, when civic leagues would hold "salad bar luncheons" accompanied by a fashion show or a bridge party. Restaurants soon picked up on the trend: in 1948, Welch's, a restaurant in Long Beach, California, advertised a "sparkling coral salad bar" that featured "the plumpest red tomatoes, tall steeple-y romaine, chives, cheeses, and croutons". In the 1970s, the salad bar soared in popularity, thanks in part to entrepreneurs Rich Melman and Jerry Orzoff, owners of the restaurant conglomerate Lettuce Entertain You. Their first establishment, R. J. Grunt's, in

Chicago, boasted a salad bar containing more than 40 items, all smartly arranged beneath flattering lighting. "It's all part of a basic formula," Melman told the *Chicago Tribune* in 1978. "We have specific lighting effects to make the food come out at you." By the end of that decade, the salad bar craze had entered the realm of family-style chain restaurants like Bonanza and Ponderosa and, eventually, fast-food outlets like Wendy's. Today, restaurant salad bars are on the wane, but the concept has found new life in gourmet food stores and suburban supermarkets all over the country, and the array of fresh and, increasingly, organic ingredients on offer is more tantalizing than ever. —Todd Coleman



SALADS

ALL DRESSED UP



Bottled salad dressings have improved considerably in recent years, but making fresh-tasting dressings at home, especially the five American favorites shown here, is easy and yields superior results. Most salad dressings belong to one of two main families: those that fit under the rubric of vinaigrettes and those that are mayonnaise based. The former—a combination of oil and vinegar or sometimes another acid, such as lemon juice—lend themselves gracefully to delicate tossed salads. The latter, richer ones pair well with substantial composed salads like the classic chef's, with peppery greens like watercress, and with crisp iceberg lettuce. Certain salads call for cooked preparations, such as hot bacon dressing (see method, page 52), an ideal match for tougher greens like mature spinach, which wilts to toothsome perfection when dressed with the heated sauce.

1 | RANCH (see method, page 52): A tangy-creamy combination of mayo, buttermilk, sour cream, chives, parsley, garlic powder, and onion powder, ranch dressing was

invented in the 1950s by a California ranch owner named Steve Henson, who served the dressing to guests at the Hidden Valley dude ranch, outside Santa Barbara.

2 | THOUSAND ISLAND (see method, page 62): This rich, thick dressing (a combination of mayonnaise, chili sauce, and chopped pickle, onion, pimientos, and hard-cooked egg), as well as its close relatives russian and blue cheese, is the obligatory partner for a cold, crisp wedge of iceberg lettuce.

3 | GREEN GODDESS (see method, page 57): A mixture of mayonnaise, sour cream, chopped herbs, lemon juice, tarragon vinegar, and anchovies, this elegant sauce was invented in the 1920s at San Francisco's Palace Hotel. The anchovies give the dressing a back note of earthy saltiness, making this delicious combination even more so.

4 | BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE (see recipe, page 61): This dressing holds pride of place in the ever growing pantheon of vinaigrettes—a somewhat remarkable fact considering that balsamic vinegar was nearly impossible to find in the United States before the 1980s. The complex, sweet flavor of that vinegar adds depth to salads but not overbearing heaviness, especially when it is combined with a good extra-virgin olive oil.

5 | AMERICAN FRENCH (see method, page 57): Anyone who's remotely familiar with French food knows that the spare vinaigrette one gets on salads in that country looks and tastes nothing like this colorful stateside invention, usually a tangy-sweet combination of egg yolk, ketchup, sugar, salt, paprika, white pepper, dry mustard, vinegar, and olive oil.



SALADS

By the mid-20th century, canned foods had given rise to some **lively and weird** salads

lists more than 60 kinds of salad, divided into categories that include green salads, cooked-vegetable salads, raw-vegetable salads, and cooked salads, among which are many with seafood or meat, precursors to the chicken, egg, and tuna salads still beloved today.

The years around the turn of the century witnessed a fascination with progress in the domestic sphere in America. For one thing, the introduction in the late 19th century of the cast-iron stove—in my view one of the earliest and greatest facilitators of women's liberation—replaced the grueling and time-consuming job of open-hearth cooking, granting women the freedom to experiment with more-nuanced cuisine. The serving of salads eventually became a sign of refined tastes, favored by the upper and upper-middle classes.

RECIPE

Mesclun Salad with Goat Cheese and Balsamic Vinaigrette

SERVES 4-6

Mesclun—a combination of slightly bitter baby greens and other greens like mizuna, arugula, and oak leaf—became all the rage in restaurants during the 1990s, eventually making its way onto supermarket produce shelves across the United States. This recipe incorporates other popular ingredients—goat cheese, pecans, dried cranberries—all dressed with balsamic vinaigrette.

- 2 heaping cups 1" cubes sourdough bread
- 3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp. dijon mustard
- 12 lightly packed cups mesclun greens
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1/2 cup pecan halves, toasted
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 4 oz. goat cheese, chilled

1. Heat oven to 350°. Toss bread cubes with 1 tbsp. of the oil in a large bowl and season with salt and pepper to taste. Arrange bread cubes on a baking sheet and bake until crisp and golden brown, 12-14 minutes. Let cool.

2. Roughly chop garlic; sprinkle with a little salt. Using the side of a knife, scrape garlic into a paste; transfer to a bowl. Add vinegar and mustard; whisk to combine. Slowly drizzle in remaining oil while whisking constantly to form a smooth vinaigrette. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Combine croutons, mesclun, cranberries, pecans, and thyme in a bowl. Add some of the dressing; toss well to combine. (Reserve remaining dressing for another use.) Crumble goat cheese over salad and divide between plates.

As the middle decades of the 20th century approached, the increasing availability of canned, jarred, and frozen foods gave rise to lively and sometimes weird concoctions. Molded salads, popular since the introduction of powdered gelatin in the late 19th century, took on all sorts of new guises (one of my favorites is a well-seasoned—often with celery salt—tomato ring filled with seafood or even chopped hard-cooked egg). Some ingredients became, for a time, a salad maker's best friend: decent mayonnaise, chili sauce (of the mild and nonthreatening variety), roasted peppers, anchovy paste, and corn niblets were just a few of the items readily available for enlivening a salad. Some of these ingredients—canned chickpeas, for example, and kidney beans—are still popular salad staples today. Others, like canned string beans, have largely fallen out of favor.

Canned fruit, in particular, spawned some of the oddest dishes. A 1941 church fund-raising cookbook from Ridgewood, New Jersey, gives a recipe for "Delicious Salad", containing a can each of pineapple and sweet cherries along with sliced oranges, marshmallows, and a cooked dressing of eggs, vinegar, and sugar with beaten cream folded in at the end. In case there might be confusion that this could be construed as a dessert, the recipe suggests serving it atop crisp lettuce. In my childhood, I was on more than one happy occasion offered canned peaches stuffed with cream cheese and napped with vinaigrette.

When it came to dressings during the early and mid-20th century, what we now consider basic materials, such as olive oil and good-quality vinegars, were virtually unknown in most American kitchens. (In many parts of the country, olive oil could be purchased only in minuscule amounts at pharmacies, where it was—and indeed occasionally still is—sold as a laxative and skin ointment.) Thus were born our seemingly numberless types of dressing, many, such as thousand island, based on ingredients near and dear to our hearts (and our refrigerators), like mayonnaise and pickles (see page 58 for a closer look at a few of our favorite dressings).

High-end restaurants, country clubs, and hotels sometimes had access to a greater selection of ingredients during these years. They also employed chefs with classical training who had an idea of what could acceptably be combined. Their customers tended to fare better than people at home, who depended on the popular cookbooks of the time. Some of the brightest creations of the era were main-course luncheon salads, designed to appeal to ladies: the chef's salad (lettuce, ham, beef tongue, turkey or chicken, and hard-cooked egg) served at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York City, the mixed-greens salad with green goddess dressing at

SALADS

Salad, by its very nature, has become the ideal playground for new ideas

San Francisco's Palace Hotel, and the cobb salad (lettuce, tomatoes, bacon, chicken, hard-cooked egg, avocado, and Roquefort) at the Brown Derby in Los Angeles were all lasting successes.

THE GRAND EXPERIMENT CONTINUES. In recent years, the choice of salads, as both first and main courses, and the list of ingredients have grown exponentially, taking cues from around the world. As the

foods at our disposal become more varied and diverse, salad, by its very nature, becomes the ideal playground for new ideas. The salads we eat today reflect more vibrantly, and more faithfully, than ever before the many immigrant cultures that thrive within our borders and also our burgeoning appreciation of small farmers and locally sourced products.

Whereas just a decade or two ago supermarket produce aisles offered a virtually unchanging cast of bare basics, today's food stores and farm stands are bursting with unprecedented variety. Even familiar salad vegetables now appear in numerous incarnations—heirloom tomatoes of every size and color, purple carrots, cucumbers both great and small. We have red onions, white onions, yellow onions, Vidalia onions, Walla Walla sweet onions, not to mention spring onions, scallions, shallots, and a whole range of chives. Garlic, once considered too aggressive for a gentleperson's table, is now ubiquitous in our salads. The selection of greens one can buy today is also staggering: formerly obscure finds, including such chicories as radicchio, chioggia, and the long, serrated puntarelle of winter, are no longer uncommon. Many kinds of cress and fresh herbs can now easily be bought year-round. And almost any market sells bags of washed mixed greens under the name mesclun. Contributing to this diverse tableau are once exotic vegetables like bean sprouts and mizuna and tatsoi (a cousin to bok choy) greens.

Americans are exhibiting the same, voracious curiosity when it comes to what they put *on* their salads. The array of oils and vinegars at specialty stores today is nearly overwhelming. High-quality first-pressing extra-virgin olive oil, from all over the world, is a given, and the vinegars on offer are made from an astounding diversity of fruits, wines, and even grains. Many of us are dispensing altogether with crystallized salt for boosting our salads in favor of using soy sauce. Indeed, the introduction of that and other Asian condiments such as mirin, sesame oil, rice wine vinegar, and ginger has vastly enhanced the everyday salads of countless home cooks and restaurateurs—a reflection, perhaps, of the gifts that America's Asian immigrants have bestowed on our everyday larder.

And yet, many of the hearty favorites of a simpler time are still with us: hard-cooked eggs, potatoes, corn, shrimp, chicken, turkey, ham, celery, canned tuna, and good old cabbage and romaine. As new gets added to old, there would seem to be no limit to the capacity of our cupboards, refrigerators, and gardens. American salad, it seems, makes room for all comers while remaining, in some elemental way, our own. 🍴



METHOD

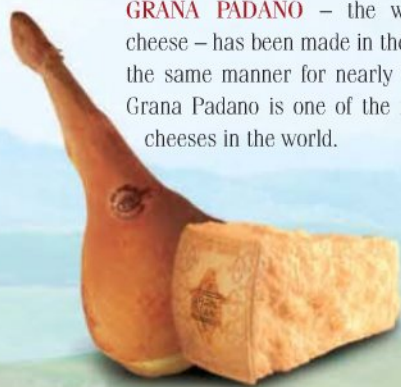
Iceberg Lettuce with Thousand Island Dressing

The invention of thousand island dressing is often attributed to Theo Rooms, a chef at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago when it opened in 1910. Other accounts hold that the thick, satisfying condiment was devised on one of the Thousand Islands, in the St. Lawrence River in Canada. This recipe is based on one used at the now defunct Filene's Restaurant in Boston. Fold together 1 cup mayonnaise, 2 tbsp. chili sauce, 1 tbsp. finely chopped white onions, 1 tbsp. finely chopped dill pickle, 1 tbsp. finely chopped cooked beets, 1 tbsp. finely chopped hard-cooked egg, 1 tbsp. finely chopped chives, 1 tbsp. finely chopped pimientos, 1 tbsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley, and 1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce in a bowl with a rubber spatula. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve over wedges of iceberg lettuce. Makes about 1 cup dressing.

Grana Padano Cheese and San Daniele Prosciutto, Italian products so unique, they're protected by law. Original and authentic European Protected Designation of Origin (P.D.O.)



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Tortellini with Grana Padano Cheese Sauté with Prosciutto di San Daniele

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 pound pasta dough
- 6 ounces ricotta cheese
- 1/3 cup grated Grana Padano cheese
- 2 egg yolks

PREPARATION

1. Prepare the pasta dough in the traditional way or purchase it pre-made.
2. Prepare the filling for the tortellini: blend together the ricotta cheese, Grana Padano cheese, and the egg yolks. Add salt and pepper to taste.
3. Roll the dough to a paper-like thickness.
4. In a vertical line, place spoonfuls of filling on rolled dough at a distance of about 1 inch from each other.
5. Wet the edges of the dough and fold it in two. Cut the tortellini giving them a half moon shape. Roll them on the forefinger

- 1/2 pound of thinly sliced Prosciutto di San Daniele
- Salt and pepper
- Butter as required

to join the two ends (this will give you the classical tortellini shape). Cook the tortellini in salt water.

6. Cut the Prosciutto di San Daniele into strips and brown it in a saucepan with butter. Add the tortellini and sauté them in this dressing.

PLATE COMPOSITION

1. Place the tortellini in the middle of the plate.
2. Top with slivers of Grana Padano cheese.
3. Serve immediately. Serves 4



A

For centuries, the language and culture of Spain's



Land Apart

Basque region have distinguished its people—and food has bound them together

BORROKA DA BIDE BAKARRA. The words, spray-painted in bright red on a white wall near the docks in Bermeo, a fishing village in northern Spain, are indecipherable to me, so I turn to my friend Mikel Zeberio, in whose car I am riding, for the translation. Mikel, a 54-year-old food journalist, former restaurant owner and cook, and general polymath, decodes the message: “The struggle is the only path.” We are in the Basque Country, where the graffiti are written in Euskera, the Basque language, and are hardly ever of

by Sofia Perez photographs by Penny De Los Santos



People who consider themselves **Basque** have been living in this corner of the Iberian Peninsula



BASQUE COUNTRY

the “Joe was here” variety. Technically, this part of the world is *in* Spain, but it’s definitely not *of* Spain. In some towns, you could pick a fight in under a minute simply by referring to the locals as Spaniards. Until the debut, ten years ago, of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the architectural marvel that initiated the transformation of that city from industrial center to tourist destination, it was rare to see an international news report covering the Basque Country that wasn’t about Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty)—the Basque separatist group commonly known by its acronym, ETA—and its violent battles with the Spanish authorities.

But Euskadi (the Basque people’s name for their homeland), a place that the locals often refer to in Spanish as their *pequeño país* (little country), has much more to offer than troubles, not least of all its food. I could not have asked for a better guide to the region and its cuisine than Mikel, whom I met a few years ago through a mutual friend who is a chef in San Sebastián. A bear of a man, though decidedly more teddy than grizzly, he is a walking encyclopedia of Basque food and wine.

Although the three Basque provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Araba (as Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and Álava are rendered locally) have been part of the Spanish state for more than five hundred years, people who consider themselves Basque have been living in the mountainous, northeastern corner of the Iberian Peninsula for more than two thousand years. The Basque homeland—an area not much larger than Delaware, with a population of roughly 2 million people—had one of the earliest democratic law codes, known as the *fueros*, and people here pay all their taxes to

Clockwise from top left: fresh-caught scorpion fish; making a corn tortilla; a street scene in a town in Bizkaia Province; mussel stock being added to tuna stew with potatoes and peppers. Previous pages, a corn miller’s hands; a centuries-old hermitage on the Basque coast; a Bizkaian woman.

RECIPE

Marmitako

(Tuna Stew with Potatoes and Peppers)

SERVES 6-8

This recipe was invented by resourceful Basque fishermen, who had to create dishes out of the staples they most often had on hand, namely, potatoes, dried peppers, and fish. The name derives from *marmita*, the Spanish word for the type of pot in which the stew was prepared.

- 6 dried choricero peppers (see page 93) or new mexico chiles, seeded
- 2 lbs. mussels, debearded and scrubbed
- 10 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium white onions, thinly sliced
- 5 large yukon gold potatoes (about 4 lbs.), peeled and cut into 1½" chunks with *cascadas* technique (see page 87)
- 5 cups fish stock
- 3 plum tomatoes, cored and chopped
- 2 lbs. boneless skinless tuna filets, cut into 2" chunks
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper

1. Bring a pot of water to a boil over medium heat, add peppers, and cook, covered, until soft, 40-45 minutes. Drain. Scrape pulp from peppers and discard skins; transfer pulp to a bowl. Put mussels into a pot, cover, and cook over medium-high heat, shaking occasionally, until mussels open, 5-7 minutes (discard any that don’t open). Set aside for 10 minutes. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve over a bowl to collect mussel broth. (Reserve mussels for another use.)

2. Heat 7 tbsp. oil in a pot over medium heat. Add onions; cook until browned, 20-25 minutes. Add potatoes; cook until somewhat softened, 10-12 minutes. Add reserved pepper pulp; cook until fragrant, 2-3 minutes. Add mussel broth and fish stock; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until potatoes are tender, 12-15 minutes. Add tomatoes; cook for 10-12 minutes. Working in batches, fry tuna in remaining oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat, turning, until golden yet rare, 2-3 minutes. Add to pot; remove from heat and let rest for 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.



From left, cutting zopako, a Basque dried bread; gathering at the weekly farmers' market in Orizaba; Basque-style garlic soup.

the provincial government, which forwards a portion of the revenue to Madrid. Further distinguishing the Basque Country is the fact that the Euskera language bears no resemblance to any of the Romance tongues spoken in neighboring countries; philologists are still arguing about its origins. "Our language is the connective thread that has helped this little country survive," says Mikel.

especially—men, in sharp contrast with the rest of Spain. Basque women still rule the home, but the men have established their own enclaves, places where they can connect over food and drink and where they are the ones in charge of the flames.

A FEW DAYS AFTER I arrive in Bilbao, Mikel gathers a group of friends at Doniene Gorrondona Txakolina, a small winery, in the coastal town of Bakio, that is known especially for its white txakoli (pronounced CHA-ko-LEE), a young, dry, mildly sparkling wine

drifted into the room and is egging Freire on in a discussion of whether or not bacalao a la bizkaina (a salt cod recipe that features a sweet pepper sauce) should be made with tomato or not, a long-standing dispute. Freire takes the bait: "Using peppers alone can make the dish bitter." Mikel shoots him a stern look, stops what he is doing, and carries over a pot of his tomatoless bizkaina sauce. "Taste," he orders Freire, as Sarratea stands next to them, making no effort to conceal a grin. Freire dips his index finger into the pot and then raises it to his mouth. All eyes

Mikel smiles at me and says, "Cooking for your friends is truly one of

When it comes to conversation, whether it's in Euskera or in Spanish (in which all Basques are fluent), people here address a holy trinity of topics: politics, soccer, and food, though not necessarily in that order. The region is home to a plethora of Michelin-starred restaurants specializing in haute, ultramodern cuisine, but the most common debates center on how to prepare traditional Basque dishes. Seemingly everyone has an opinion because just about everyone here cooks, including—and

made from hondarrabi zuri, an indigenous grape. Mikel is multitasking in the kitchen, cooking several dishes, among them a hearty potato and leek soup known as porrusalda, while his 60-year-old friend Kepa Freire, who runs a smoked-fish company, acts as his sous-chef, stopping every so often to regale me with stories on local culinary history. "Traditional food here means everything," Freire says. "The rest is just a lie."

Meanwhile, Andoni Sarratea, a 38-year-old who is one of the winery's co-owners, has

are on him. After a pause, he launches into a story about what a great cook his mother was, not so deftly avoiding an admission of defeat. Sarratea erupts into laughter, and Mikel returns to the stove.

Later, Mikel takes me to the small city of Mungia, where he and Freire prepare a multicourse feast for ten in Freire's *txoko* (pronounced CHO-ko), one of the private, dues-paying, all-male gastronomic clubs of which there are scores throughout the Basque Country. Here, in an establishment



co-owned by all the members, the men set a long wooden dining table, and those who are not manning the stoves in the restaurant-grade kitchen mill around, observing and offering their two cents. “I make mine a little differently,” says Pedro Prieto, a friend of Freire’s, as he leans over a pot of Mikel’s marmitako—a savory tuna and potato stew brightened with mild peppers called chorizeros—bubbling away on the stove.

In addition to the marmitako, Mikel cooks up a rich, dense garlic and bread soup using zopako, a dried, rusklike bread pro-

meal that Mikel and I have purchased earlier from Luis Azillona, a miller (see page 86). The kernels that Azillona uses have been toasted before they are ground; the process yields an earthy, smoky flavor that enhances the dessert’s bittersweet filling.

IN VIRTUALLY EVERY PLACE where Mikel and I travel, the tradition of men gathering over food and drink is reenacted again and again. At Urbitarte, a cider house and restaurant in the town of Ataun, in Gipuzkoa, where apples have long been an important crop, we join Mikel’s cousin Juantxu Zeberio and a group of his closest friends, who meet here every Tuesday night in a venerable communal ritual that has experienced a resurgence in recent years. “Txotx!” yells Demetrio Terradillos, the ringleader and also the chef; the word (pronounced CHOTCH) in this context refers to the wooden stick once used for plugging the hole of a hard-cider barrel. Terradillos’s call is the signal that a jet of the fizzy amber beverage is about to be released. In unison, everyone rises from the tables, tumblers in hand. At the barrel, each person bends forward in turn, lowering his or her glass almost

the great pleasures of life”

duced in the Basque Country specifically for use in long-simmering dishes. Slightly charred on the outside, the zopako absorbs the concentrated flavor of the garlic and chicken stock and gives the finished soup a comforting, pillowy texture. Seeing everyone enjoy the food, Mikel smiles at me and says, “Cooking for your friends is truly one of the great pleasures of life.”

For dessert, Freire makes tortillas stuffed with dark chocolate—a dish known as talos con chocolate—using finely ground corn-

METHOD

Sopa de Ajo

(Basque-Style Garlic Soup)

Garlic soup is made all over Spain, but the Basque version is unique in that it uses a special dried bread called zopako, which is unavailable in the U.S. We found that an oven-dried baguette makes a good substitute. Heat oven to 250°. Wrap a 3" x 10" baguette in foil and bake until somewhat dried out, about 2 1/2 hours. Let cool. Cut the baguette into 1" pieces and transfer, with any crumbs, to a bowl. Bring a pot of water to a boil over medium heat. Add 6 seeded dried chorizero peppers (see page 93) or new mexico chiles, cover, and cook at a rapid simmer until soft, 40–45 minutes; drain. Scrape pulp from peppers and discard skins; set aside. Heat 2/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil in pot over medium heat. Add 8 chopped cloves garlic; cook until golden, 2–3 minutes. Add bread, with its crumbs, and cook until toasted, 6–7 minutes. Add 2 1/2 quarts chicken stock and reserved pepper pulp and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until bread has separated into small pieces and the soup has thickened, about 2 hours. Season with salt to taste. Serves 4–6.

BASQUE COUNTRY

to the ground to catch the arc of cider, and follows the stream to its source (the motion is designed to aerate the cider and create more fizz). No one wears his or her best shoes to a cider house meal.

The menu rarely varies: there is a bacalao (salt cod) omelette, fried bacalao with peppers, enormous beef chops (grilled and sprinkled with coarse salt), and, for dessert, walnuts, idi-

METHOD

Porrusalda

(Potato and Leek Soup)

Sometimes bacalao (salt cod) is added to this home-style soup. Heat 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil in a pot over medium heat. Add 3 large sliced onions; cook until soft, 20–25 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer onions to a bowl; leave oil behind. Add 4 large yukon gold potatoes (3 lbs.), cut into 1½" chunks with the *cascadas* technique (see page 87), and cook until golden, 7–9 minutes. Add reserved onions, 8 stemmed seeded dried choricero peppers (see page 93) or new mexico chiles, 6 chopped leeks (white and light green parts only), 4 chopped carrots, 2 quartered medium tomatoes, 2 cups cubed calabaza squash, salt to taste, and 5 quarts water. Bring to a boil. Reduce to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Serves 8–10.

Bacalao al Pil-Pil

(Salt Cod in Garlic Sauce)

Make sure to use skin-on salt cod; the natural gelatin in the skin is vital to emulsifying the sauce. Put four 4" x 4" skin-on boneless salt cod filets (about 1½ lbs. in all; see page 93) into a large bowl. Cover cod with water, refrigerate, and soak, changing water 6–8 times, for 48–72 hours. Remove cod from water; pat dry. Heat 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat. Add 5 thinly sliced cloves garlic; cook, stirring, until garlic is light golden brown, 4–5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer garlic to a plate; set aside. Reduce heat under skillet to very low; let cool for 5 minutes. Add cod filets, skin side up, and cook until just hot, spooning the hot oil over them, 8–10 minutes. Carefully transfer all but a few tablespoons of the oil to a small pot over very low heat. Flip cod filets; arrange toward center of skillet. Allow cod to cook gently until bubbles of gelatin begin to form in oil. Gently rock skillet back and forth every 1–2 minutes while whisking oil in skillet constantly to form an emulsion. As more gelatin forms in skillet, slowly drizzle in reserved oil a few tablespoons at a time, while whisking constantly, to make a smooth sauce, about 20 minutes in all. Garnish with reserved garlic. Serves 4.

azabal (a local sheep's milk cheese), and apple jelly. In the cuisine of the Basque Country, many of the same ingredients appear repeatedly in almost innumerable but subtly nuanced variations. "This place is aesthetically beautiful, but its riches are measured," Mikel says. "Because of the humidity and the harsh landscape, it's never been an easy place to farm."

Given the Basque region's connection to its coastline, which stretches for more than 150 miles, fish are an important part of the local diet, and the fishing and canning industries dominate community life in many coastal villages. In the Bizkaian town of Ondarroa, Mikel introduces me to José Antonio Aguirreoa, head of Conservas Aguirreoa, a fish canning business started by his grandfather in 1888. As we walk through town, he points to the church steeple and to a metallic object perched near the bell. "That siren goes off whenever fishing boats return to port, letting everyone know what they're carrying: one ring means tuna, two for sardines, and three, anchovies."

Though geography and weather may have conspired to limit the local larder, the Basque culinary imagination is anything but restrained. People here have found a way to create grand dishes out of very little. A case in point is bacalao al pil-pil, a dish that Mikel teaches me to make the next evening. It calls for nothing more than skin-on salt cod, olive oil, garlic, and, if the cook is feeling bold, a guindilla—a skinny, green, mildly piquant chile. Warming the fish slightly in a small amount of garlic-infused olive oil, Mikel takes the skillet off the heat and then, shaking it regularly, adds more oil, a little at a time, until it emulsifies the gelatin released from the cod's skin. The result is a thickened, almost opaque golden sauce that softens the pungency of the garlic and the briny tang of the salt cod, producing an elemental fusion all its own.

FROM ONDARROA, Mikel and I drive inland, toward the mountainous Bidegoian district of Gipuzkoa Province, where we meet 36-year-old Pello Urdapilleta, who lives with his wife, mother, and two small children in his ancestral home. In a place where language is identity, a name can mean everything, and in the case of Urdapilleta, it became his destiny. When his father died, the 19-year-old Urdapilleta decided to put together a genealogical chart. Tracing his surname—

Clockwise from top left: a few of Pello Urdapilleta's euskal txerria piglets; salt cod in garlic sauce; Kepa Freire; potato and leek soup.



Though geography and weather



limit the local larder, the Basque culinary imagination is anything but restrained



RECIPE

Talos con Chocolate

(Corn Tortillas with Melted Chocolate)

SERVES 6

In the Basque Country, a local variety of corn, called tzakinarto, is toasted and milled into a flour, which is used for handmade corn tortillas that are typically eaten with chocolate or with savory fillings like chorizo, bacon, and bacalao. The corn and its flour are unavailable in the U.S., but we found that masa harina, a Mexican product, makes a suitable substitute.

- 4 cups masa harina (see page 93)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 6 tbsp. canola oil
- 6 oz. semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, broken into pieces

1. Combine masa, salt, and 2½ cups water in a large bowl. Work the mixture with your hands to form a soft dough. Divide dough into 6 equal pieces and form each into a ball. Cover dough balls with a clean towel.

2. Working with 1 dough ball at a time, press flat into a 4" disc. Using your fingers, press dough out into a 7" circle, neatening up the edges slightly as you go along; the result should be a thick, rough-hewn tortilla. Run a spatula under the tortilla to release it and transfer to a large plate; top with a piece of wax paper. Repeat process with remaining dough balls, stacking tortillas between pieces of wax paper.

3. Heat 1 tbsp. of the oil in a medium cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Lay a tortilla in the skillet and cook, flipping once, until light golden brown and cooked through, 6–8 minutes in all. Transfer tortilla to a plate, put a little of the chocolate along half the tortilla, and fold in half. Let the warmth of the tortilla melt the chocolate. Repeat process with remaining oil, tortillas, and chocolate. Serve hot.

which literally means pig pile—he discovered that his family tree had pig-farming roots in the area going back at least as far as 1575. Eight years later, he read a newspaper article about the disappearance of two of the three indigenous types of Basque pig and, after asking around, found that the remaining breed, the euskal txerria, was also on the verge of extinction. Given his own family's historical ties to pig farming, he vowed to try to ensure the breed's survival, visiting area farmers who had a few of the animals left and buying as many as he could find. Over time, he and his brother Roke raised a small herd of these



From left, corn tortillas with melted chocolate; sitting down to dinner at the Urbitarte cider house in Ataun.

spotted creatures known for their long, floppy ears. The siblings now have more than a hundred pigs in their own "pile".

The animals spend much of the year outdoors, feeding on grass, wild herbs, and the nuts of beech, chestnut, hazelnut, and walnut trees, a diet responsible for the complex, nutty flavor and buttery texture of the hams and charcuterie made from their flesh. The meat is different from, but comparable in quality to, the more famous pata negra pork products that come from Spain's Extremadura region, in the southwest. Though Urdapilleta is not trying to compete with that larger, more established industry—right now, his venture is simply a demanding hobby (he works full-time for a meat company in a nearby town)—he hopes to make his living from it someday.

Later, we sit down to a lunch of spit-roasted, crisp-skinned chicken topped with bits of fried bacon along with plates of euskal txerria ham and salchichón sau-

sage that Maite, Urdapilleta's wife, has set out. Being able to preserve a part of Basque heritage has been rewarding, he tells me as he refills my glass, but he insists the source of his satisfaction is deeper than that. "The best thing about this work, the thing that makes the most sense to me," he says, "is being able to share it with people seated around a table, like this." 🐷

THE PANTRY, page 93: Sources for dried choricero peppers, skin-on salt cod filets, and masa harina.





THE GUIDE

BASQUE COUNTRY

COUNTRY CODE: 34

EXCHANGE RATE: 0.76 euro = \$1

Dinner for two with drinks, tax, and tip:

EXPENSIVE Over \$100 MODERATE \$35–\$100 INEXPENSIVE Under \$35

WHERE TO STAY

CASTILLO DE ARTEAGA *Gaztelubide 7, Gautegiz-Arteaga (94 627 0440; www.panaiv.com/ingles/castillo/castilloarteaga.asp). Rates: \$160–\$190 double.* Housed in a restored castle, this stunning, 14-room hotel is a peaceful yet elegant retreat. Relax on the roof deck while enjoying views of the lush, green countryside.

HESPERIA BILBAO *campo Volantín 28, Bilbao (94 405 1100; www.hesperia-bilbao.com). Rates: \$85–\$225 double.* Rooms at this mod hotel, centrally located on the Nervión

River, are minimalist in design but comfortable. Reserve one that faces the water, and take in the shimmering lights of the promenade at night.

WHERE TO EAT

ARBOLAGAÑA *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, plaza del Museo 2, Bilbao (94 442 4657). Moderate.* This elegant restaurant offers a blend of strong, accessible flavors and haute cuisine refinement. Chef Aitor Basabe is an avid fisherman, and his seafood dishes—like flaky, moist machote (red porgy) served with a squid ink risotto—are particularly good.

BASERRI MAITEA *Atxondo, Forua (94 625 3408; www.panaiv.com/ingles/baserri/baserrimaitea.asp). Moderate.* Located in a traditional *caserio* (farmhouse), this restaurant serves up wonderful smoke-tinged fare, such as pichón (squab) and chipirones (baby squid), straight off the grill, but the other menu options, like a rich seafood soup studded with clams and shrimp, are more than their equal.

KAIA KAIPE *General Arnao 4, Getaria (94 314 0500; www.kaia-kaipe.com). Expensive.* At this split-level eatery, you'll enjoy the freshest-possible seafood and an impressive list of Spanish wines. Don't miss the txangurro al horno, succulent spider crab meat simmered in an aromatic txakoli (a white wine) and tomato sauce, then lightly baked in the crustacean's carapace.

MUGARITZ *Otzazulueta baserria, Aldura aldea 20, Erreterria (94 352 2455; www.mugaritz.com). Expensive.* Specializing in neither molecular

gastronomy nor rustic country fare, Mugaritz steers its own course with austere but exquisite creations, such as a roasted red mullet filet served with an ethereal saffron and rockfish reduction and a milk-flavored ice cream with tapioca pearls and hazelnut tuiles.

RESTAURANTE GUGGENHEIM BILBAO *avenida Abando-ibarra 2, Bilbao (94 423 9333; www.restauranteguggenheim.com). Expensive.* Gehry's building will engage your mind, and this restaurant will stimulate your stomach with memorable dishes like veal confit in a scallion-garlic broth topped with crisp, thyme-infused bread crumbs and a calabaza-bergamot custard served with heady beer ice cream.

URBITARTE *Ergoiena Auzoa, Ataun (94 318 0119). Inexpensive.* The classic cider house menu of bacalao, beef, and cheese provides a perfect counterpoint to the fizzy fermented brew that comes streaming out of the *kupelas* (barrels).



STARS OF INDIA

How tandoori
chicken,
naan, and
korma
became
Indian
restaurant
classics

Moti Mahal's tandoori
chicken, above. Facing
page, cooks in the kitchen
at Moti Mahal Delux.





INDIAN CLASSICS

BY MARGO TRUE PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

I first ate tandoori chicken about 20 years ago, at a white-tablecloth Indian place called Shiva, in Houston. The owner was justly proud of the juicy, tender, deep red bird, charred slightly from the ferociously hot clay oven in which it was cooked. I loved it and many other dishes I came to know there over the next several years: stretchy naan flat bread, a roasted eggplant dish called bhaigan bharcha, fragrant rice biryanis and meat kormas, and emerald green saag paneer, made of spiced spinach and cubes of fresh cows' milk cheese. In Indian

restaurants from Seattle to Atlanta, I've ordered those dishes dozens of times, and if you're a fan of Indian food you probably have too. But it wasn't until I started reading cookbooks and making Indian dishes on my own, then traveling and eating all over India, that I began to realize how much else was out there.

India is teeming with cuisines and subcuisines, yet those of us in North America mainly know only two of them: rustic village cooking from the Punjab and the extravagant court cuisine of the Moghul emperors, both from the northern part of the country. How did these cooking styles, and a handful of their emblematic dishes, come to dominate Indian-restaurant menus here, as fixed as portraits in a gallery?

IT'S IN THE OLD CITY OF DELHI, in the heart of northern India, that I begin to understand. I stand in the spartan kitchen of Moti Mahal restaurant, redolent of spices and smoke, and watch a cook rub seasoned yogurt into the flesh of a chicken. This is the place credited with bringing tandoori chicken to the world. Its founder was Kundan Lal Gujral, a Punjabi Hindu from what is now Pakistan. As a boy in the city of Peshawar, Gujral began working at a food stall; it was ambitiously called Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace). The stall's centerpiece was a tandoor, a cylindrical clay oven used for bread baking in that part of the subcontinent for centuries.

After Partition divided India and Pakistan in 1947, Gujral and millions of other Punjabi Hindus fled across the border to India. All along the Grand Trunk Road, the major highway of the north, refugees set up small public food

MARGO TRUE is the food editor for *Sunset*. Her most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "Coming Home to Cafe Annie", in the November 2006 issue.

Facing page, spices for sale near Delhi's Jama Masjid mosque.

RECIPE

Tandoori Chicken

(Yogurt- and Spice-Marinated Chicken)

SERVES 4-6

This version of tandoori chicken—intricately spiced, juicy, and tender—tastes even better if you allow the chicken to rest in the second, yogurt-based marinade overnight. To re-create the heat of a tandoor oven, we placed a baking stone in our conventional one and cranked it as high as it would go. For hard-to-find Indian ingredients, see *THE PANTRY*, page 93.

4	skinless bone-in chicken legs	1½	tsp. cardamom seeds
3	skinless bone-in chicken breast halves, each halved crosswise	1½	tsp. garlic powder
6	cloves garlic, coarsely chopped	1½	tsp. ground bay leaf
1	3" piece peeled ginger, coarsely chopped	1½	tsp. ground cinnamon
	Salt	1½	tsp. ground cloves
3	tbsp. canola oil	1½	tsp. ground ginger
1	tbsp. distilled white vinegar	1	cup plain yogurt
1	tbsp. kashmiri red chile powder or paprika	½	tsp. ground black salt (optional)
		6	green thai chiles, stemmed and finely chopped
			Chat masala (optional)

1. Make 2"-wide slashes about ½" deep all over chicken pieces. Cut knee joints on legs halfway; transfer all the chicken to a large bowl.

2. Purée garlic, ginger, and ¼ cup water in a blender; add to chicken along with 2 tsp. salt, half the oil, vinegar, 1 tsp. chile powder, and half of each of the following: cardamom, garlic powder, bay leaf, cinnamon, cloves, and ground ginger. Toss to coat; refrigerate overnight.

3. Put yogurt, black salt, chiles, and all remaining oil, chile powder, cardamom, garlic powder, bay leaf, cinnamon, cloves, ground ginger, and salt to taste into a bowl; mix. Pour yogurt mixture over chicken; massage into flesh for 2-3 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap; let marinate at room temperature for 1 hour.

4. If using, place a baking stone on the middle oven rack; heat oven to 500° (or 550°, if possible). Line a baking sheet with foil; place a baking rack directly on top of the foil. Arrange chicken pieces (with any marinade that clings to them) on top of the rack in a single layer. Bake, rotating baking sheet once, until crisp, lightly charred, and cooked through, about 25 minutes for breasts and 35 minutes for legs. Sprinkle with chat masala, if you like. Serve hot.

INDIAN CLASSICS



Moti Mahal caused a sensation; you could even say it launched the modern Indian restaurant

Cooking up korma and other moghul specialties at Karim's, above. Facing page, dal makhani at Moti Mahal.

stalls called *dhabas*, complete with tandoor ovens, and offered basic cooking to other travelers. (In later years, those *dhabas* evolved into truck stops, with wash stations and cots for napping.) Gujral was one of many refugees whose final destination was Delhi. Inside the boundaries of the old, walled part of the city, he opened a *dhaba*, christened it Moti Mahal in remembrance of his boyhood employer, and constructed a tandoor. At this new establishment, Gujral cooked just three dishes: tandoori chicken, naan, and dal makhani, a blend of lentils simmered in a pot nestled in the embers of the oven.

After my visit to Moti Mahal, I explore the city on foot. Taking in the variety of places to eat, from humble *dhaba*-style spots to upscale restaurants, I marvel at how far this city's dining scene has come. When Kundan Lal Gujral arrived here in 1947, Delhi (and, for that matter, India) had a limited dining-out culture. Complex dietary codes, both religious and social, meant that most Hindu families ate only home-cooked food, which met scrupulous standards for preparation. There were establishments serving Anglo-Indian cooking and Muslim-run *dhabas* but few formal places where Hindu families could sit down and enjoy a meal.

On this relatively empty stage, Moti Mahal caused a sensation; you could even say it launched the modern Indian restaurant. Comfortable for families to visit, it also served immensely appealing food. There's some uncertainty as to whether Gujral actually invented tandoori chicken—it may, for all anyone knows, have been some anonymous Punjabi village baker—but in his hands the bird turned into a thing of glory. He developed its signature seasoning

paste, based on ginger, garlic, and other aromatics, and he was a master at working the hot coals.

Gujral's stall quickly expanded to the lot next door, and he enlarged his menu, adding other Punjabi specialties. By all accounts, he was a grand character, a stout man who wore elegant tailored suits, liked his whiskey, and would greet his guests by bending down to touch their feet in a traditional Hindu sign of respect. Before long, the country's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was dropping by, and even foreign eminences like Jackie Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev feasted on Gujral's chicken. Meanwhile, other *dhabas* transformed themselves into conventional-style restaurants (often called "hotels" in India), with Punjabis at their helms, and started featuring tandoor-cooked food on their menus too. "It was like a wildfire," says Delhi food consultant Marut Sikka. "Every roadside

RECIPE

Dal Makhani

(Creamy Spiced Indian Lentils)

SERVES 6-8

This rich, creamy dish takes its name from *makhan*, the Hindi word for butter. For hard-to-find Indian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 93.

- 1½ cups kali sabut urad dal (whole black lentils)
- ½ cup channa dal (split yellow lentils)
- ½ cup rajma dal (small red kidney beans)
- 1 tbsp. mustard or canola oil
- 6 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
- 2 thai green chiles, stemmed and coarsely chopped
- 1 2" piece peeled ginger, coarsely chopped
- 6 tbsp. ghee
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. ground turmeric
- 1 cup canned peeled whole tomatoes, puréed
- 2 tbsp. garam masala
- 1 tbsp. kasoori methi (dried fenugreek leaves; optional)
- 1 tsp. kashmiri red chile powder or paprika
- Salt
- 1½ cups milk
- 8 tbsp. butter, cut into pieces
- ½ cup heavy cream

1. Combine dals and wash under running water until it runs clear. Toss with oil in a bowl; set aside. Purée garlic, chiles, ginger, and ¼ cup water in a blender; set paste aside.

2. Heat ghee in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add cumin; cook for 1 minute. Add onions and cook until browned, 8-10 minutes. Add paste, coriander, and turmeric; cook for 3 minutes. Add tomatoes and cook, stirring and scraping until thickened, 6-7 minutes. Add dals and 2 quarts water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer, covered, until tender, about 2 hours. Add garam masala, kasoori methi, chile powder, and salt to taste; simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in milk and butter; simmer for 5 minutes. Drizzle cream on top and serve.





Taking a tea break, above. Facing page, bhaigan bhartha.

INDIAN CLASSICS

dhaba, every restaurant, every wedding, served tandoori chicken and dal makhani.”

BY THE TIME MOTI MAHAL was reaching the apex of its popularity, the Punjabi dishes it had popularized in India had already begun their migration abroad, accompanied by another of northern India's marquee cuisines: that of the royal courts of the Moghuls, which comprised rich curries and tender roasted meat kebabs (see “Royal Food for the Common Man”, right). By talking to restaurateurs and historians in Delhi and elsewhere, I learned how this migration and marriage of cuisines came about—a story that also begins with Punjabi refugees. In 1947, two such people, Iqbal Ghai and Peshori Lal Lamba, opened a small restaurant in New Delhi (the more general “Delhi” refers to both the old part of the city and the new) and called it Gaylord, a riff, in part, on the first initials of their surnames. Ghai and Lamba started out small and quickly branched out. Amid growing competition, their hook was a more sophisticated setting and a mixed menu: on it were the kinds of Punjabi tandoori foods that Moti Mahal had made famous, as well as moghul dishes such as biryanis. (Today, Delhi's original Gaylord is closed. The owners decided that the real estate was more valuable than the restaurant itself.)

By the mid-1950s, other restaurants began to offer menus that mimicked Gaylord's. Things went so well that Ghai and Lamba opened outlets in other Indian cities, and in 1957 they took Gaylord to London, replicating their signature combination of Punjabi and moghul cooking. Londoners loved it. The United States was next: Ghai and Lamba had already tested the waters at the India Pavilion restaurant at the 1964–65 world's fair in New York City, serving the dishes that had proven popular in London. The enthusiastic response at the fair, coupled with the loosening of immigration

ROYAL FOOD FOR THE COMMON MAN

In 1913, more than 30 years before Moti Mahal introduced tandoori food to Delhi, a Muslim cook named Haji Karimuddin set up a food stall called Karim's near the Jama Masjid, the largest mosque in India. His ancestors supposedly cooked for the entire line of Moghul emperors, starting in the 16th century, and Karimuddin served the kind of delicate Indo-Persian cooking that epitomized that court's cuisine. His goal—now expressed on the company website, www.karimhoteldelhi.com—was “to earn fame and money by serving the royal food to the common man”. Today Karim's is run by a constellation of sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons. From the start, its minced-meat kebabs, soft in texture and spiced in such an expert way that each bite seemed to glow warmly in the mouth, were so popular that versions of them were greedily appropriated by restaurants throughout Delhi that opened after Partition. Gaylord, which later established branches in the United States and elsewhere, was one of them, and it helped enshrine moghul cooking on the Indian restaurant menu.

Located off a lane lined with gritty food stalls and heaving with humanity, stray goats, and squalling autorickshaws, Karim's still does a terrific business. To find it you have to look for a small red sign opposite a narrow opening between buildings. Duck through that tight passage into a pocket of warm, spicy, meaty aromas, where you'll find a tiny courtyard ringed with small dining rooms and a hodgepodge of open kitchens. Directly in front is an elevated platform where breads, including the amazing roomali roti—as thin and soft as a fine muslin handkerchief—are baked. The platform is surrounded by metal pots on burners, in which simmer various meat and vegetable specialties (the oily and delicious goat korma, dark with browned shallots, is a big seller; the burra kebab, a meltingly tender roasted lamb chop, is another). A charcoal kebab brazier runs along the window of one of the dining rooms, and above it, on a sort of balcony, is the tandoori meat kitchen, cordoned off with meat- and fish-laden skewers ready for the ovens. To take in this scene while the muezzin wails from the adjacent mosque and then to feast on plates of kebabs, kormas, and roasted meats is to savor Delhi. —M.T.

METHOD

Bhaigan Bhartha

(Mashed Smoky Eggplant with Tomatoes)

This smooth-textured, luscious side dish—the word *bhartha* means to pulverize in Hindi, referring to the fact that the ingredients are traditionally mashed in a mortar with a pestle—is excellent served with rice on naan (see page 83). For hard-to-find Indian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 93. Cook 2 medium eggplants (2 lbs.) directly over a medium gas flame, turning, until charred and softened, 10–12 minutes each. Remove skin and roughly chop flesh. Mash eggplant flesh with the bottom of a drinking glass; set aside. Heat 8 tbsp. ghee in a pot over medium-high heat. Add 2 tsp. cumin seeds and cook for 30–45 seconds. Add 3 finely chopped medium red onions and cook until browned, 25–30 minutes. Add 8 finely chopped cloves garlic and 4 stemmed finely chopped thai green chiles; cook until lightly browned, 4–5 minutes. Add 4 chopped medium tomatoes and 4 tsp. sugar; cook until thickened, about 5 minutes. Add eggplant, 1½ tbsp. garam masala, 1 tbsp. kashmiri red chile powder or paprika, and salt to taste. Cook until hot, 3–4 minutes more. Serve garnished with sliced tomatoes, julienned ginger, and chopped cilantro leaves. Serves 4.





INDIAN CLASSICS

quotas in 1965, which brought a huge influx of Indian immigrants to the States—many of them weaned on the same Punjabi-moghul fare that Gaylord had pioneered in its home country—assured them of customers.

The Chicago Gaylord opened in 1972; then the New York location, in 1974; several others followed. The Punjabi-moghul menus stayed consistent; no one wanted to tamper with a successful formula. That combination “was the

METHOD

Naan

(Tandoori Flat Bread)

For this method, we use a cast-iron skillet and a baking stone to replicate a tandoor oven. Moti Mahal's bread maker forms its naan into a triangle; we stretch ours into a circle that fits the skillet. Whisk together 4 cups flour, 1 tbsp. plus 1 tsp. baking powder, 1 tbsp. salt, and 1 tbsp. sugar in a bowl. In another bowl, whisk together 1¼ cups milk, ⅓ cup plain yogurt, 2 tbsp. canola oil, and 1 lightly beaten egg. Pour milk mixture into flour mixture; mix into a dough. Knead dough on a floured surface until smooth, 10–12 minutes. Form dough into a ball; cover with towel; let rest for 30 minutes. If using, place a baking stone on the middle oven rack; heat oven to 500° (or 550°, if possible). Divide dough into 12 pieces; cover with towel. Working with 1 dough piece at a time, stretch it over a medium inverted bowl into a 6”–8” circle. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat until very hot. Peel dough off bowl; lay in skillet. Bake until puffed on top, 2–3 minutes. Brush naan with butter. Makes 12.

goose that laid the golden egg,” says Marryam H Reshii, the restaurant critic for the *Hindustan Times*. Fledgling Indian restaurateurs in America seized on Gaylord as their model (sometimes literally copying its menu). The American dining public, entranced by a profusion of restaurants offering these bold flavors, was impressed.

BACK IN DELHI, the success of Gaylord's more sophisticated model hasn't dampened the popularity of Moti Mahal in the least—as I find out when I visit the restaurant during the lunch rush. Despite Gujral's retirement in 1990 and a change in ownership, the place is bustling, its tables packed with office workers munching on chicken and naan.

Vinod Chaddha, a veteran Delhi restaurateur, bought the original Moti Mahal in 1992. (Years earlier, Gujral and his business partners had opened a few satellite locations dubbed Moti Mahal Delux. In 2003 Gujral's grandson Monish started up an entirely separate chain of 63 restaurants all over India under the name Moti Mahal Delux Tandoori Trail.) Gujral's original *dhaba* still stands in the corner of a dilapidated but lovely courtyard, where singers of *qawwalis* (Muslim devotional songs) perform on most nights. As I sit in the shadowy space, with its slow fans spinning overhead, I relish the tandoori chicken's unrefined, sour-spicy tang.

Chaddha joins me at the table and explains that he fol-

lows Gujral's original tandoori chicken recipe. (Moti Mahal Delux Tandoori Trail makes the same claim.) “We only use a maximum 600-gram chicken.” (That's just over a pound.) “Bigger chicken is tough.” To show me the preparation from the start, he disappears into the kitchen and returns with one of his cooks, who is holding a chicken in one hand and a tray of spices and condiments in the other. We head into the courtyard, where there's more room for a cooking demonstration, and I watch as the cook slashes the bird with a knife (the cuts will allow the heat and seasonings to penetrate the flesh evenly), then coats it with spices, ginger-garlic paste, and vinegar and sets it aside to let it marinate for several hours. Back in the kitchen for the final steps, he pulls a premarinated chicken from a large bowl and applies the second marinade, of yogurt and a blend of spices. He reaches for a few birds that have rested in the second marinade, slides them onto a long metal skewer, and lowers them into the tandoor. Fifteen minutes later, they're done.

Nearby, the naan wallah (bread maker) kneads a batch of soft white dough with his knuckles until it's properly elastic, then forms it into little balls, pats and pulls them one by one into triangle shapes, and slaps each against the wall of the tandoor. They puff and blister in seconds. With a twist of a skewer, the naan wallah lifts them out into a serving basket.

The last of Gujral's original trio of dishes, dal makhani, bubbles in the depths of the oven, in a giant steel pot, where it is allowed to simmer overnight. The slow cooking, along

As I sit
in the
original
Moti
Mahal, I
relish the
tandoori
chicken's
unrefined,
sour-spicy
tang

RECIPE

Karim's Korma

(Goat Curry)

SERVES 4-6

This recipe is for an adaptation of a dish served at Karim's and employs a technique called *bhoona*, in which the meat, spices, and wet ingredients are stewed together until the mixture reduces and the main ingredient browns. For hard-to-find Indian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 93.

9 cloves garlic, chopped	2 tsp. cumin seeds
3 lbs. bone-in goat shoulder, trimmed and cut into 4" pieces	2 tsp. kashmiri red chile powder or paprika
4 cups plain yogurt	1 tsp. whole cloves
2 tbsp. amchoor (sour mango powder)	3 cups canola oil
1 tbsp. cardamom pods	1 3" piece peeled ginger, julienned
1 tbsp. ground coriander	Salt
1 tbsp. whole black peppercorns	6 shallots, thinly sliced

1. Purée garlic and ⅓ cup water in a blender. Put garlic paste, goat, yogurt, amchoor, cardamom, coriander, peppercorns, cumin, chile powder, cloves, ⅔ cup oil, ginger, and salt to taste into a pot; stir. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium. Boil gently, stirring and scraping up browned bits from bottom of pot, until meat is tender, about 2 hours.

2. Heat remaining oil in a pot over medium heat until oil registers 325° on a deep-fry thermometer. Add shallots and cook, stirring constantly, until brown, 3–5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer shallots to a paper towel-lined plate. When cool, pulse shallots to a coarse paste in a spice grinder. Add shallots and 2 cups water to pot and cook, stirring, until goat is tender and beginning to brown and sauce is thickened, about 45 minutes more. Season with salt. Serve with basmati rice, if you like.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: tea at a Delhi *dhaba*; Karim's goat curry; a Delhi market vendor; Moti Mahal's naan.

INDIAN CLASSICS

with hefty dollops of cream and butter stirred in before the dish is served, makes it velvety smooth. I follow one of the waiters, bearing a metal dish filled with this rich concoction, back to my table; one spoonful reminds me why Punjabi cuisine caught on with as much alacrity in Delhi as it eventually did in Houston and countless other places.

It pleases me to know that our now well-established familiarity with North Indian food in the United States has begun to function as a bridge to other Indian regional cuisines. I consider the delicate vegetarian cooking of Gujarat available at Chicago's Village Hut and the sesame- and coconut-laced seafood curries of Andhra Pradesh served at San Francisco's Dosa. Seated before the beautiful spread of food at Moti Mahal, I marvel at how Kundan Lal Gujral set the simple dishes he served on an international course. The results have won us over, and, I think to myself, now we're ready for more. 

THE PANTRY, page 93: Sources for kashmiri red chile powder, cardamom seeds, ground bay leaf, ground black salt, chat masala, dals, mustard oil, ghee, fenugreek leaves, garam masala, and sour mango powder.

RECIPE

Matar Paneer

(Curry with Peas and Fresh Cheese)

SERVES 4-6

In this classic Punjabi dish (facing page), peas and chunks of the fresh Indian cheese known as paneer are bathed in a spiced tomato-based gravy. Many restaurants enrich the dish with a lashing of cream. For hard-to-find Indian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 93.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 6 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped | or paprika |
| 1 4" piece peeled ginger, half of it coarsely chopped, half julienned | 5 medium tomatoes, cored and chopped |
| 6 tbsp. ghee | 1 cup canola oil |
| 1 tbsp. cumin seeds | 1 1/2 lbs. paneer (Indian fresh cheese; see page 86), 1 1/4 lbs. cut into 1/2" cubes, 1/4 lb. crumbled |
| 3 cardamom pods | 1 cup frozen peas, thawed |
| 2 whole cloves | 1 tbsp. garam masala |
| 1 3" cinnamon stick | Salt, to taste |
| 1 large red onion, finely chopped | 2 tbsp. finely chopped cilantro leaves |
| 2 tsp. ground turmeric | |
| 1 tsp. kashmiri red chile powder | |

1. Purée garlic, chopped ginger, and 1/4 cup water to a coarse paste in a blender; set aside. Heat ghee in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add cumin, cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until just browned, 7-8 minutes. Add ginger paste, turmeric, and chile powder and cook, stirring occasionally, until ghee separates from the paste, about 3-4 minutes. Stir in chopped tomatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, until brick red and thickened, 12-14 minutes. Add 1 quart water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until slightly thickened, 10-15 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Working in batches, fry paneer cubes, gently turning once or twice, until lightly browned, 2-3 minutes per batch. Using a slotted spoon, transfer cubes to a paper towel-lined plate.

3. Add paneer cubes, peas, garam masala, and salt to pot and stir to combine. Heat through, 1-2 minutes more. Garnish with julienned ginger, crumbled paneer, and cilantro.

THE GUIDE

DELHI

COUNTRY CODE: 91 AREA CODE: 11

EXCHANGE RATE: 45 rupees = \$1

Dinner for two with drinks, tax, and tip:

EXPENSIVE Over \$60 MODERATE \$30-\$60

INEXPENSIVE Under \$30

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WHERE TO STAY

HOTEL MARINA G-59 Connaught Circus (2332 4658; reservations@marinadelhi.com). Rates: from \$126 double. A clean, reliable, medium-size businessmen's hotel. In the center of Delhi, it's ideally located for exploring the city.

THE OBEROI Dr. Zakir Hussain Marg (2436 3030; www.oberoihotels.com). Rates: from \$375 double. A sanctuary from the noise and bustle of Delhi, this hotel features excellent service and four good restaurants (one, 360°, has five kitchens that, between them, offer everything from tandoori cooking to sushi).

WHERE TO EAT

BUKHARA and DUMPUKHT ITC Hotel Maurya Sheraton & Towers, Diplomatic Enclave, Sardar Patel Marg (2611 2233). Expensive. Both housed in the same hotel, Bukhara is Delhi's, if not India's, finest tandoori restaurant, bar none, while Dum-pukht serves the city's most exquisite biryani and kebabs.

KARIM'S Opposite Jama Masjid on Gali Kabiban, also known as "kebab lane" (look for the small red sign 200 yards from the mosque's main gate; 2326 4981; www.karimhoteldelhi.com). Inexpensive. Just getting there is an experience; then your mind—and taste buds—will be blown by Karim's itself. Go for the korma, the burra (tandoor-roasted lamb chops), and the kebabs.

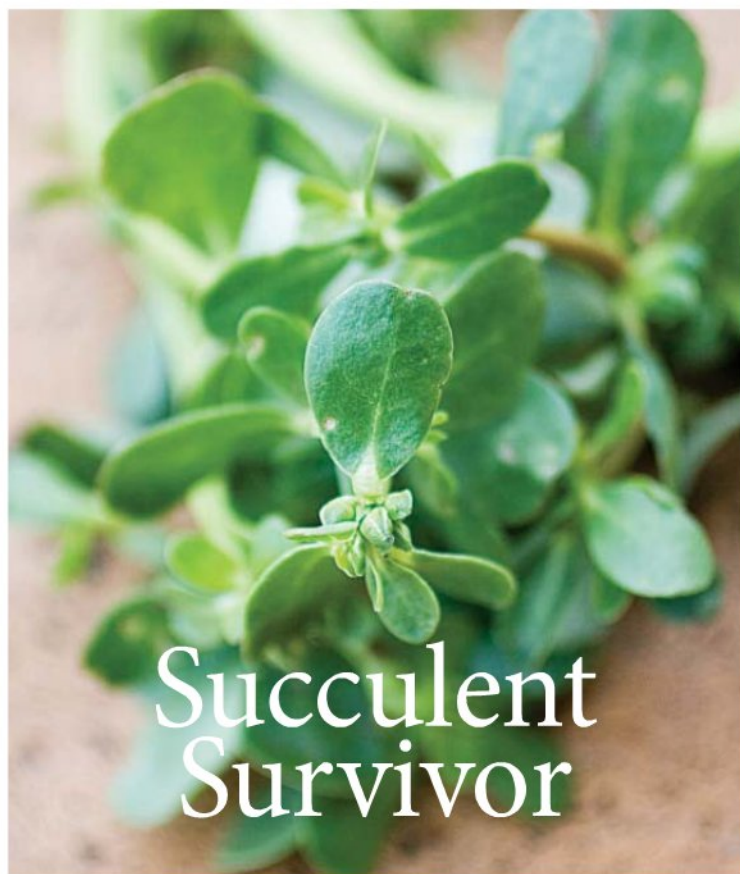
MOTI MAHAL 3704 Netaji Subhash Marg (2327 3661). Inexpensive. Kundan Lal Gujral's original location, in the heart of the old city, and the birthplace of tandoori chicken.

MOTI MAHAL DELUX TANDOORI TRAIL V3S Mall Laxmi Nagar (3247 8975; www.tandooritrail.com). Inexpensive. One of 63 locations, this chain owned by Gujral's grandson Monish is a tribute to his grandfather's tandoori stalwart.

PUNJABI KHANA 1516 Asaf Ali Marg, opposite Delight Cinema (2326 6268; www.sweetysingh.com). Inexpensive. A humble urban dhaba serving true Punjabi country cooking: great food, and you'll get to meet the charming owner, Sweetie Singh.



KITCHEN



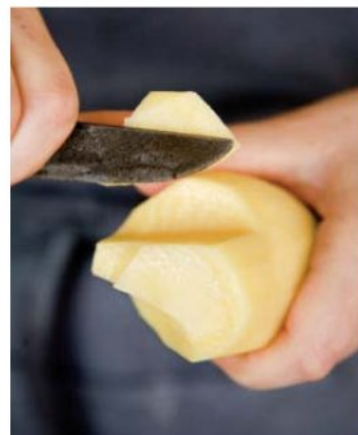
Succulent Survivor

THE NEXT TIME you happen to be in Southern California and stuck in freeway traffic, check out what's growing by the side of the road; chances are, some of it is purslane. That thick-stemmed green with clusters of paddle-shaped leaves is—like cactus, jade plant, and other succulents—a hardy survi-

vor capable of weathering heat and a lack of water. Native to Central Asia, common purslane (not to be confused with winter purslane, also called miner's lettuce, which belongs to a different genus) is widely used in cooked dishes and as a salad green across the Mediterranean and in Mexico, where it's called verdo-

lagas (see page 49). I first encountered purslane while working as a line cook at Hubert's, a restaurant in Manhattan that was one of the incubators of new American cooking in the early 1980s. We didn't know much about this edible weed, but I was immediately taken with its pleasantly sour bite and resilient texture. It was like a meatier version of watercress, with a lemony tang. Back then, I couldn't find many recipes for purslane, so I simply started including it in salads and sautés as a quirky add-in. In 1994, when Paula Wolfert's *The Cooking of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Morrow) came out, I was ecstatic to find in that book a wonderful recipe for a purslane salad with cucumbers, radishes, tomatoes, and spearmint. It became my template for a lot of variations. Purslane's robust flavor stands up to hearty herbs like mint, savory, and even chiles. Cooked, it is great in tacos and as a filling in omelettes, and it serves as an excellent thickener in soups. It also keeps in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. I know that because I once came home from my local farmers' market with an armload of the stuff, only to discover that my husband—aware that I'd prefer purslane to flowers—had decided to do the same. (See *THE PANTRY*, page 93, for a source.) —Katherine Alford

Jagged Edge



Cooks tend to cut vegetables into nice, even shapes. But recently my friend Mikel Zeberio (see page 64) reintroduced me to a technique that my mother taught me years ago. When preparing potatoes for the Basque stews *marmitako* and *porrusalda*, he cuts the tubers into irregular chunks called *cascadas*; the word derives from the Spanish verb *cascar*, meaning to crack. Holding a potato in one hand, he inserts a knife partway into its flesh and twists it to break off briskly one jagged piece after another. According to Mikel, the *cascadas'* roughly hewn surface releases more starch—which thickens soups and stews—than an evenly cut slice would. It's easy to master; you could even say it's a snap. —Sofia Perez



HOW TO MAKE PANEER

Here's how to make the fresh Indian cheese (which can also be purchased at many Indian grocers) called for in the curry with peas and fresh cheese recipe on page 84. **1** | Put 18 cups milk and 2½ tsp. salt into a large pot; bring just to a boil, stirring occasionally. **2** | Add ½ cup fresh lemon juice; turn off heat. Large curds will form. Using a wooden spoon, gently push curds together toward one side of the pot; do not stir, or the curd will break into small pieces. **3** | Strain mixture through a colander lined with 4 large layers of dampened cheesecloth. Let curds drain briefly, undisturbed. **4** | Gather ends of cheesecloth together to form a purse. Tie ends around a wooden spoon. Place spoon over a large pot, balancing ends so that purse hangs freely. Let drain at room temperature for 1 hour. Discard any liquid that collects in pot. **5** | Unfold cheesecloth and rewrap curds into a rectangle; wrap package in a kitchen towel. Place package on a cutting board and top with a baking sheet; weight down with several heavy pots and pans. Press cheese for 1½ hours, rewrapping and tightening the cheesecloth every 30 minutes (which helps form a compact shape). **6** | Unwrap paneer and cut as desired; refrigerate for up to 3 days. Makes about 1½ lbs.

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A Cultured Taste

I STILL REMEMBER THE DAY when, as a young cook working at a private club, I was asked to fill an order for a glass of buttermilk. Buttermilk—as a beverage? I’d never heard of such a thing. I later learned, however, that long before it lent its creamy tartness to ranch dressing (see page 52), buttermilk was an old-fashioned curative and thirst quencher. It also forms the liquid base of many cold eastern European soups and is even occasionally mixed with chopped chives and drunk as a refreshment. What is buttermilk, exactly? Traditionally, it’s the liquid that’s left over when slightly fermented cream or whole milk is churned into butter. After it ferments a bit more, it develops its signature flavor. Real buttermilk, though, has gone the way of the ten-cent cup of coffee. The kind that’s commonly available these days is cultured; pasteurized skim milk is treated with several types of lactic acid bacteria that thicken and sour it, producing diacetyl, an organic compound that accounts for buttermilk’s distinctive taste. The curdled milk is then agitated to break apart the curds; the resulting mixture has a texture similar to that of thin yogurt. No matter how buttermilk is made, I too have learned to love it as a rich, restorative drink. I guess I’ve finally grown up. —T.C.

METHOD

Kwaśne Mleko Ze Szcypiorkiem

(Polish Buttermilk Drink with Chives)

André Baranowski, a regular *SAVEUR* photographer who grew up in western Poland, used to consume this beverage as prepared by his mother, Alicja, in the 1960s. “It was always cold and refreshing,” he says, “with chives straight from our garden.” In a small glass, stir together 1 cup chilled buttermilk, 1 tbsp. roughly chopped chives that have been smashed lightly with the edge of a knife, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serves 1.

Bites of Passage

Several years ago, I was on a New York City subway with a bagful of eels. Although they’d been gutted and cleaned, they continued to slap loudly against the bag. I tried tucking it beneath my feet, but the eels just slapped against the metal bench. Heads turned. A woman changed seats. I spent the rest of the ride with my head down, trying to avoid eye contact. I was a *SAVEUR* kitchen intern. Those intrepid folks are the lifeblood of our test kitchen, of which I’m now the director. Each year, about eight new ones rotate in from all over the country for stints of three to six months to help with the task of researching, shopping for, and testing the recipes that appear in the magazine. Many are culinary-school students, others are seasoned cooks, and all have one thing in common: they have no idea what’s in store for them. We put them through all manner of adventures, from simultaneously cooking three turkeys to locating 15 pounds of goat meat at a butcher in Manhattan during a transit strike or dragging 40 heads of lettuce across town for a photo shoot (see some of them on page 54). Because of the volume of recipes tested for every issue, time is always of the essence, and the learning curve is steep. Those 15 pounds of goat meat? That intern had a cold and couldn’t smell that the meat was rotten, even after we opened the package. When we sent another intern on a mission to find foodstuffs from six different countries—a fairly typical shopping trip—he returned distraught. A shopkeeper at our favorite Asian grocery had angrily refused to accept our credit card. Later, I looked at the receipt; it was for seven cents’ worth of thai chiles. Suffice it to say that on some days recipes aren’t the only things that get tested in the *SAVEUR* kitchen. —Liz Pearson



KITCHEN



The Miller's Son

IN MUCH OF SPAIN, corn is used mostly as animal feed, but in a few northern areas, including the Basque Country (see page 64)—where it was a subsistence crop during tough economic times—it's more widely consumed. In the small town of Gamiz-Fika, Luis Azillona, a third-generation miller and retired engineer, grinds a local

variety of toasted corn using the tools and techniques of his ancestors. Covered with fine cornmeal dust, he took a break to chat with me during my recent visit.

How long has corn been grown in the Basque Country?

It first arrived here from the Americas in the 16th or 17th century.



In small villages near Mungia, like this one, there were periods when corn was eaten three times a day.

Do you still get your corn from local farmers?

Yes, though there are fewer of them than in my grandfather's era. I weigh the kernels and take a small percentage as my fee; that's the way

it's always been done. Sometimes farmers grow more corn than they need, and if it's of high quality, I buy the surplus, grind it, and sell it to *txokos* [private gastronomic clubs], restaurants, and retailers.

How often do you cook with cornmeal?

Two to three times a week in the winter. When it's cold, we'll sometimes make *sarteneko*: you fry bacon, salt pork, and chorizo to render the fat and then wrap the meat in a *talo* [a handmade corn tortilla]. I also like to dip the *talo* into the drippings left behind in the skillet. It's wonderful for your blood pressure and cholesterol [he laughs].

Any plans for the future?

I hope to set up a small museum here. I've drawn up my will so that after I'm gone, this place will be maintained and these traditions can endure. —S.P.

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KITCHEN

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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered food products and kitchenware too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY LIZ PEARSON

Fare

Buy delicious fresh and frozen tenderized **octopus** (prices vary) from Octopus Garden (86 Avenue U, Brooklyn, New York; 718/946-9221).

List

When in Oahu, don't miss the plate lunch at **Sharks Cove Grill** (59-712 Kamehameha Highway, Haleiwa; 808/638-8300); sweets at **Lee's Bakery & Kitchen** (125 North King Street, Honolulu; 808/521-6261), **Ted's** (59-024 Kamehameha Highway, Haleiwa; 808/638-8207), **Sunny Side** (1017 Kilani Avenue, Wahiawa; 808/621-7188), **Dee Lite Bakery** (1930 Dillingham Boulevard, Kalihi; 808/847-5396), and **Liliha Bakery** (515 North Kuakini Street, Honolulu; 808/531-1651); classic eats at **Ono Hawaiian Foods** (726 Kapahulu Avenue, Honolulu; 808/737-2275); poke at **Fort Ruger Market** (3583 Alohea Avenue, Honolulu; 808/737-4531); *okazu-ya* delights at **Mitsu-Ken** (1223 North School Street, Honolulu; 808/848-5573) and **Gulick Delicatessen** (1512 Gulick Avenue, Honolulu; 808/847-1461); roasted meats at **Nam Fong** (1029 Maunakea Street, Honolulu; 808/599-5244); laksa soup at **Green Door Cafe** (1145 Maunakea Street, Honolulu; 808/533-0606); cocktails at **House Without a Key** (Halekulani Hotel, 2199 Kalia Road, Honolulu; 808/923-2311); opaka at **Hoku's** (Kahala Hotel & Resort, 5000 Kahala Avenue, Honolulu; 808/739-8779); the **Kapiolani Community College Farmers' Market** (4303 Diamond Head Road, in the campus parking lot, Honolulu; 808/947-3804); or

shave ice at **Waiola Shave Ice II** (525 Kapahulu Avenue, Honolulu; 808/735-8886).

Cellar

For **wines** from the riesling producers listed in our tasting notes, contact Robert Chadderdon Selections (212/332-4999) for the Albert Boxler Grand Cru Sommerberg; Martin Scott Wines (516/327-0808) for the Domaine Ernest Burn; Vineyard Brands (205/980-8802) for the Domaine Weinbach Grand Cru Schlossberg Cuvée Ste Catherine "L'Inédit" and the Domaine Weinbach Grand Cru Schlossberg Vendanges Tardives Trie Spéciale; the Sorting Table (707/603-1460) for the Domaine Zind-Humbrecht; Frederick Wildman and Sons (212/355-0700) for the Hugel Jubilee; Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant (510/524-1524) for the Maison Kuentz-Bass Cuvée Tradition and the Meyer-Fonné Grand Cru Wineck-Schlossberg; Wilson Daniels (707/963-9661) for the Marc Kreydenweiss Grand Cru Kastelberg; and Dia-geo Chateau & Estate Wines (707/299-2600) for the Trimbach Cuvée Frédéric Émile.

Mexico City Market

Kitchen/Market (888/468-4433; www.kitchenmarket.com) sells dried **guajillo** (\$3.20 for a 2-ounce bag), **mora** (\$3.10 for a 2-ounce bag), and **árbol** chiles (\$2.55 for a 2-ounce bag) for making the three-chile salsa. To make the cactus salad, order fresh prickly pear **cactus** (\$13.30 for a 3-pound package; ask for "nopales") from Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com) and **queso fresco** (\$5.95 for a 14-ounce package) from Kitchen/Market (888/468-4433; www.kitchenmarket.com). Melissa's/World Variety Produce (above) also sells the fresh **epazote** (prices vary) you'll need for making the corn with lime juice and chile powder. For the same recipe, order **queso fresco** (above) and powdered **piquin** chiles (\$4.55 for a 2-ounce package) from Kitchen/Market (above), which also sells the **queso oaxaca** (\$5.95 for a 14-ounce package) for making the squash blossom quesadilla. To buy fresh **purslane** for the purslane and pork stew, see Kitchen (below).

Basque Country

To make the tuna stew with potatoes and peppers, Basque-style garlic soup, and potato and leek soup, buy dried choriceró **peppers** (\$12.00 for a 200-gram jar) from Despaña Brand Foods (718/779-4971; www.despanabrandfoods.com). La Tienda (800/710-4304; www.latienda.com) sells skin-on **salt cod** (\$19.95 for each 12.7-ounce piece) for making the salt cod in garlic sauce. If you need **masa harina** (\$1.75 for a 1-pound bag; ask for "Maseca") for the corn tortillas with melted chocolate, order some from Kitchen/Market (888/468-4433; www.kitchenmarket.com).

Indian Classics

Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; www.kalustyans.com) sells kashmiri red **chile powder** (\$5.99 for a 4-ounce bag) to make the yogurt- and spice-marinated chicken, creamy spiced Indian lentils, mashed smoky eggplant with tomatoes, and curry with peas and fresh cheese. It also sells **cardamom** seeds (\$6.99 for a 4-ounce bag), ground **bay leaf** (\$5.99 for a 2-ounce bag), ground **black salt** (\$4.99 for a 4-ounce bag), and **chat masala** (\$2.75 for a 100-gram box) for making the yogurt- and spice-marinated chicken, as well as whole **black lentils** (\$3.99 for a 1-pound bag; ask for "whole urad dal"), split **yellow lentils** (\$3.99 for a 1-pound bag; ask for "chana dal"), small red kidney **beans** (\$2.75 for a 1-pound bag; ask for "small rajma"), **mustard oil** (\$5.99 for an 8-ounce bottle), and dried **fenugreek** leaves (\$4.99 for a 100-gram bag; ask for "kasori methi") for making the creamy spiced Indian lentils. Kalustyan's also sells **ghee** (\$9.99 for a 1-pound jar) and **garam masala** (\$4.49 for a 4-ounce bag) for making the creamy spiced Indian lentils, mashed smoky eggplant with tomatoes, and curry with peas and fresh cheese, as well as sour **mango powder** (\$3.99 for a 4-ounce bag; ask for "amchoor") for making the goat curry.

Kitchen

Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com) sells fresh **purslane**. Pricing and availability vary, so call for details.

Correction

Laurie Smith took the photo on the cover of *SAVEUR*'s first issue, in 1994, a copy of which was photographed by Michael Kraus and shown on page 24D of our March 2007 issue. • In the March 2007 issue, the shrimp chowder recipe on page 55 should have called for 1/4 lb. of slab bacon.

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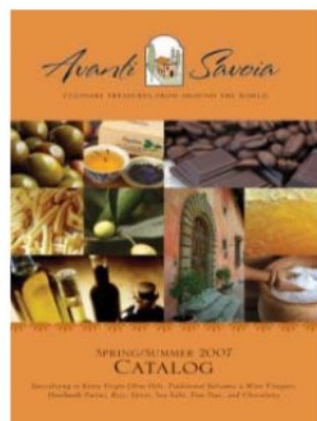
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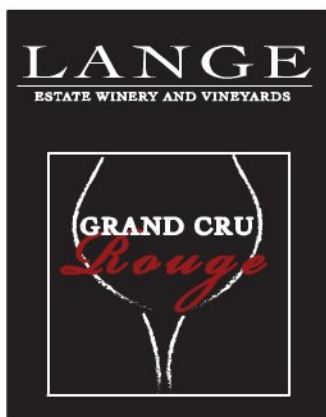
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M O M E N T



TIME 1:20 P.M., June 29, 2005

PLACE Kaohsiung, Taiwan

At this toilet-themed restaurant in southern Taiwan, to each patron a throne.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID LIN/REUTERS

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